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Basic and the Teaching  
of  
English in India

**ADOLPH MYERS**



PANDIT JAWAHARLAL NEHRU,  
*discussing Basic English in relation to  
the language problem in India, says:*

A number of scholars, after many years' labour, have evolved a simplified form of English which is essentially English and indistinguishable from it and yet which is astonishingly easy to learn.... This whole vocabulary and grammar can be put down on one sheet of paper and an intelligent person can learn it in two or three weeks. He will require practice of course in the use of the new language. Those who learn Basic English not only have a simple and efficient means of communication with others, but they are already on the threshold of standard English and can proceed further if they so wish.

I THINK THAT WHERE WE TEACH ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN TONGUE, AND WE SHALL HAVE TO DO THIS ON AN EXTENSIVE SCALE, BASIC ENGLISH SHOULD BE TAUGHT.

(From *The Question of Language*,  
Congress Economic and Political  
Study No. 6.)



# Basic and the Teaching of English in India

by

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*Honorary Adviser to the Council of National Education  
in Burma*

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## PREFACE

THIS book is based on numerous lectures I have given to large concourses of teachers in various centres in India and Burma.

By 'lectures' I mean not only my own formal expositions but the hundreds of questions which I have been asked and the prolonged informal discussions which they have invariably provoked. Indeed, my own original composition has been continuously shaped and reshaped by the questions and discussions following all the lectures gone before, so that no two courses have ever been quite alike. It was only when I found that no new questions were being asked and no new points raised in discussion that I sat down to write.

Thanks, therefore, to this involuntary co-operation I can, I think, be fairly certain that nothing relevant to the subject has been omitted, and that nothing irrelevant has been included. I feel the book should prove useful, practical and very much 'to the point' if only because so many practical teachers and educationists have in this way contributed to its making.

For this reason the book, as it has finally emerged, will be found rather different from the usual book on the teaching of English as such. As was pointed out to me on more than one occasion, many books have been written on the teaching of English in recent years but the standard of English in the schools has by no means risen in proportion, if at all. All the writers, or nearly all, have had something new to say, but not sufficiently new, it appears, to effect any marked improvement in

## PREFACE

results. What was wanted, I found, was not so much a description and explanation of the various methods in use, as a commentary on them in the light of the new linguistic discoveries made by the Orthological Institute.

I soon realized that it was possible to assume a knowledge of the beaten track on the part of my hearers; and I made it my practice to return to the track only when it was necessary to show that a track which is beaten is not necessarily the best.

Thus the first section of the book is devoted to an exposition of the new discoveries; the middle section relates them to the problems which are now more than ever vexing the mind of the English teacher; the third seeks to reveal the underlying unity between the various uses to which Basic may be put, and to answer the criticisms to which it has been subjected.

Turning to 'acknowledgments' I want, first, to emphasize that I make no claim to originality for this book other than with regard to the method of *presentation*; I have merely sought to make explicit to the teacher in India what is already implicit in the great body of Basic literature.

I need hardly say, for example, that but for the criticism and advice of Mr. C. K. Ogden, who as Director of the Orthological Institute was primarily responsible for the researches that led to Basic English, this 'essay in interpretation' would not have been possible. Similarly I am indebted to the authors of almost all the books listed in the Appendix, and since I cannot mention them all I must ask them to accept this general acknowledgment as an expression of my gratitude and admiration for their work, which has provided so much of the material for this exposition.

## **PREFACE**

I have also to thank Mr. A. I. Burrows, Head of the English Department, Teachers' Training College, Rangoon, for reading the proofs and making some very useful suggestions.

Q4

A.M.

*Bombay, December 1938.*



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**PART ONE**  
**FIRST PRINCIPLES**



## CHAPTER I

### THE IMPORTANCE OF WORD-SELECTION

It is the first day of the new school year. We are standing before a class of some thirty to forty Indian children. They are anything between seven and ten years of age. They do not, as yet, know a word of English. What, as teachers of English, are we setting out to do with them, or rather *for* them? What exactly do we mean when we say, "We are going to teach them English"?

Our *ideal* aim is obvious: we want them, as quickly as may be, to be able to understand, read, speak and write English as easily and as fluently as an English child *of the same age*. More than that, naturally, we cannot expect. But how are we to judge the standard of 'ease' and 'fluency' with which the English child uses his own language? Let us take the two simplest tests — (1) the number of different words he uses, (2) the accuracy with which he uses them.

A child of normal intelligence begins to understand simple words in his mother-tongue ('Mummy', 'Daddy', 'naughty', 'nice',) in the ninth to twelfth month of his existence. Soon afterwards he begins to use them himself. At the end of his second year he is beginning to put them together in simple sentences ("I want to go out," "I don't like this," "Where's Daddy going?") By the time he is five he has a working vocabulary of some 3,000 different

words. Some of them he often uses wrongly ('buy-ed' for 'bought', 'catched' for 'caught', etc.). In another two years, say one at home, one at school, he has increased his vocabulary to from four to five thousand words and has eliminated, through sheer force of example, the worst of his earlier grammatical errors.

That is, he has learnt enough language to indicate his needs, to play games, to express opinions, to pass on information to his friends, and, in short, to do and say everything which is within the range of his limited experience and powers of comprehension and association.

Now what of the Indian child of the same age? He has, more or less, the same needs; plays, in the main, the same sort of games; expresses, roughly, the same opinions; passes on, in effect, the same information. That is, his *mind-age*, as determined by the limits of his youthful experience, is the same. But his *word-age*, as far as English is concerned, is exactly 0; he knows no more words than a new-born English child! (See Figure 1).

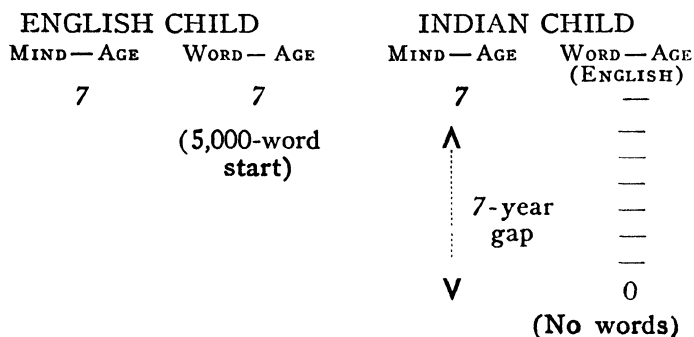


Figure 1

Here, then, is the first great obstacle to the achievement of our ideal aim — we have to *catch up*, to cover the ground lost over seven years of rapid development and varied activity. Is that possible? It might be. There have, for example, been English children who because of some mental defect have started to talk much later than is normal but who have yet succeeded, in time, in *catching up*. If our Indian children lived in an English environment, where they absorbed new English words as a sponge absorbs water, mechanically, without effort, where they would *have* to use these words constantly in all their comings and goings, they might do likewise.

But they do *not* live in an English environment. At the most they learn English, within the four walls of the classroom, for a period or two each day. All their other subjects, at least in the lower forms, are taught in their own language. All their activities outside school are carried on in their own language. They hardly *use* any of the English words they learn at all, if we think of the hundreds of times the English child uses them every day. They have to acquire, *artificially*, words and usages which the English child drinks in as *naturally* as he drinks water. So this is the second great handicap which faces the Indian child at the outset of his 'word race' — not only does he start a long way after his English 'opposite', but even when he does start for nine-tenths of his time he is 'out of the running'.

For the English child will not stand still, waiting for his Indian brother to *catch up*. He is going forward all the time, with ever-increasing momentum, extending his vocabulary, increasing his accuracy.

strengthening his command over his own mother-tongue. Looked at in this way our task may well seem hopeless. Theoretically, at least, we must resign ourselves to the humiliating thought that this initial gap of seven years between 'mind-age' and 'word-age', far from getting smaller, will be getting bigger all the time; we must resign ourselves to the fact that our Indian children must for ever be limited, as far as *English* is concerned, not by their experience and understanding but by the very scanty stock of words they can acquire in the little time they can give to English. We must, it seems, regard it as inevitable that their *English* reading books will always be equivalent, in thought-content, in subject-matter, to *vernacular* books which they have long left behind in much lower forms.

We know of course that this is one of the reasons why the English lesson is despised or at best only tolerated — because it is only a rather boring means to an indeterminate end. But what can we do? We are helpless; the odds are too great. They become still more depressing when we look at them in the second diagram (see Figure 2 opposite) giving the comparative rate of increase of vocabulary.

This diagram, though theoretically correct, is not of course entirely in accord with the facts. It *exaggerates* the difficulty. We know from experience that our children at the age of 15, after 8 years of English, are in fact able at least to *understand*, if not to *express*, ideas that are well above the mental age of the English child of five, though these ideas may at the same time be a long way below their own mental age of 15. But the whole object of this dia-



ENGLISH CHILD		INDIAN CHILD	
MIND—AGE	WORD—AGE	MIND—AGE	WORD—AGE (ENGLISH)
11	11	11	—
	(8,500 words)	Λ	—
	7,000 words		—
	ahead	8-year	—
		gap	—
			—
			—
		V	3
			(1,500 words
			after 4 years
			of English)
15	15	15	—
	(12,000 words)	Λ	—
	9,000 words		—
	ahead		—
		10-year	—
		gap	—
			—
			—
		V	5
			(3,000 words
			after 8 years
			of English)

Figure 2

gram is to raise the question: "Why should it be wholly true in theory and only partly in fact?"

## One Idea, Many Words

It would be true in practice as well as in theory if for every idea familiar to the English child, whether of a thing (like 'noise'), a quality (like 'great'), or an act (like 'say') there were only *one* word and no other. If there were in fact only *one* word for every idea or concept such as 'noise', 'great', 'say', then in order to be able to express all the ideas the English child expresses the Indian child "would have to acquire the same number of words as the English child uses — and this, as we have seen, is impossible.

But if you think for a moment you will realize that for every idea or concept there is *not* just one word; there are many words, sometimes as many as twenty or thirty, which all have the same or nearly the same meaning. This is true of all languages, but it is particularly true of English. Think, for example, of some of the words the English child *might* use, and often *does* use, instead of 'noise', 'great' and 'say':

<i>Noise</i>	<i>Great</i>	<i>Say</i>
squeak	large	tell
din	big	mention
clang	huge	inform
clatter	vast	remark
roar	tremendous	declare
racket	enormous	state
hubbub	immense	assert
boom	terrific	announce
rattle	gigantic	reply

An English child<sup>1</sup> might, for example, read or talk about the

*noise* of a machine, or the  
*clang* „ „ „ , or the  
*clatter* „ „ „ , or the  
*roar* „ „ „ , etc.

He might read or talk about the

*big* house, or the  
*large* „ , or the  
*great* „ , or the  
*huge* „ , etc.

Let us suppose, for the sake of argument, that for every idea the English child expresses there are, in fact, *ten* words with the same or nearly the same meaning. We have said that at the age of eleven he has a vocabulary of about 8,500 words. That would mean therefore, if for every *one* idea he has a choice of *ten* different words, that he is limited by his experience to a range of 850 ideas (8,500 divided by ten).

So that if we *choose*, out of every group of ten words with the same or nearly the same meaning, *one* word whose meaning covers all the rest in that group, in the sense that 'noise' covers 'squeak', 'din', 'roar,' etc., we can, by teaching the Indian child these 850 words *first*, enable him to read and express the same range of ideas (850) as the English child. We can, that is to say, reduce the gap between mind-age and word-age in one-tenth of the time that it would take if we insisted on a complete knowledge of *all* the words (see Figure 3 overleaf).

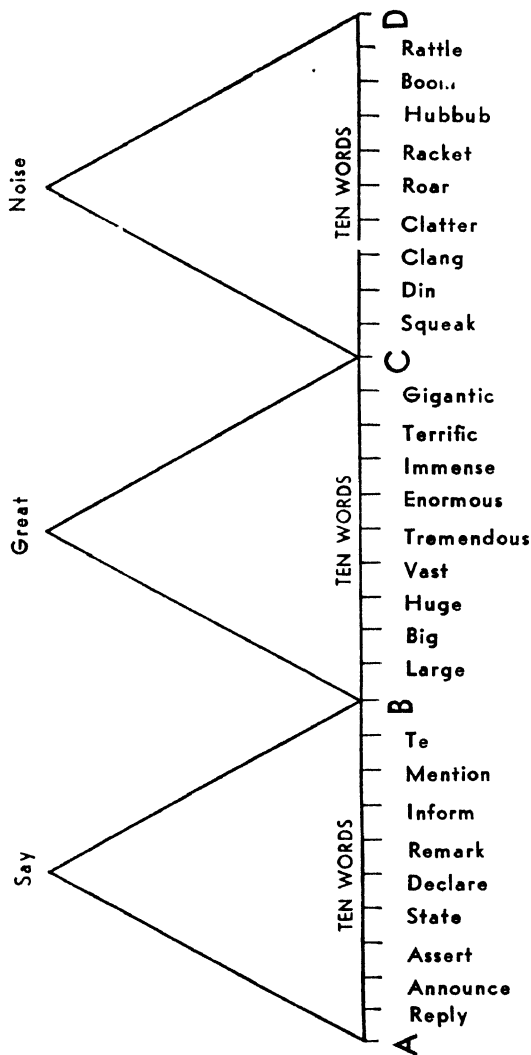


Figure 3. Covering — Words

If, on the other hand, we said, "No! our children must have, from the very outset, as *rich* a vocabulary, as many synonyms, as the English child," and began to teach the first 850 words in *groups of ten*, we should cover, in the same time as it takes to teach the 850 individual *selected* words covering 850 ideas, only 85 ideas — leaving 765\* still uncovered!

And so, reduced to its *simplest* terms, the problem presents itself in this form: "Should we start out to teach the 8,500 words in groups of ten, taking each group of ten synonyms as one indivisible unit, or should we select *one* word from each of the 850 groups, teach these 850 words first, and then go on to build up the vocabulary by further selections of 850 words?"

That is to say, in what *order* should we teach the 8,500 words?

Like this?

- |                   |                       |                     |
|-------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|
| 1. <i>noise</i>   | 11. <i>great</i>      | 21. <i>say</i>      |
| 2. <i>squeak</i>  | 12. <i>big</i>        | 22. <i>tell</i>     |
| 3. <i>din</i>     | 13. <i>large</i>      | 23. <i>mention</i>  |
| 4. <i>clang</i>   | 14. <i>huge</i>       | 24. <i>inform</i>   |
| 5. <i>clatter</i> | 15. <i>vast</i>       | 25. <i>remark</i>   |
| 6. <i>roar</i>    | 16. <i>tremendous</i> | 26. <i>declare</i>  |
| 7. <i>racket</i>  | 17. <i>enormous</i>   | 27. <i>state</i>    |
| 8. <i>hubbub</i>  | 18. <i>immense</i>    | 28. <i>assert</i>   |
| 9. <i>boom</i>    | 19. <i>terrific</i>   | 29. <i>announce</i> |
| 10. <i>hiss</i>   | 20. <i>gigantic</i>   | 30. <i>reply</i>    |

Or like this?

1 <i>noise</i>	2 <i>great.</i>	3 <i>say</i>
851 squeak	852 big	853 tell
1701 din	1702 large	1703 mention
2551 clang	2552 huge	2553 inform
3401 clatter	3402 vast	3403 remark
4251 roar	4252 tremendous	4253 declare
5101 racket	5102 enormous	5103 state
5951 hubbub	5952 immense	5953 assert
6801 boom	6802 terrific	6803 announce
7651 hiss	7652 gigantic	7653 reply

The question has only to be put in this form to be answered. Obviously, if our aim is to wipe out the gap between 'mind-age' and 'word-age' as quickly as possible, we *must* select one word from each of the 850 groups and teach the 850 selected words *first*.

## The Concentric Method

All that this means is that we can, if we wish, teach English from Form 1 up to Form 10 in the same way as we teach history and geography and other subjects from Form 1 up to Form 10, that is, by what is known as the concentric method. The history syllabus in the lower forms is not, as a rule, limited to the detailed study of any one particular period in any one particular country; it is designed to cover the broad sweep of history in general outline, leaving the picture to be filled in, in ever-increasing detail, as the child goes up the school. It is

the same with geography. The child is not made to study the geography of any one country in detail, first, leaving the rest of the world an unexplored blank. First he gets the general outlines of the world as a whole, and afterwards he fills in the picture, in greater and greater detail.

This concentric method is already being applied to the teaching of English *grammar*. For example:

- Form 3.* Main divisions — the different parts of speech, nouns, adjectives, etc.
- Form 4.* First sub-divisions — the two *principal* kinds of nouns (common and proper) — the main kinds of adjectives, etc.
- Form 5.* First sub-sub-divisions — the *four* kinds of nouns, common (material, abstract, collective) and proper, etc., etc.

Why then should not this same principle be applied to the teaching of the English language as a whole — words, idioms *and* grammar? As far as words are concerned our syllabus might then be illustrated in this way. Suppose round the circle on page 28 we could write down all the 500,000 words in the English language in the same way as we have written 'squeak', 'din', etc., *i.e.*, in groups of words that are related in meaning. And suppose we could also write down, in the way we have written 'noise', 'great' and 'say', the 850 words which have been scientifically selected to cover the meanings of all the other words, or, if they are technical terms, to put them into operation. Then our plan will be, by teaching the 850 words first, to get round the whole

circle in *broad outline* first, and then, as we go up the school, go round and round the circle, not slowly,

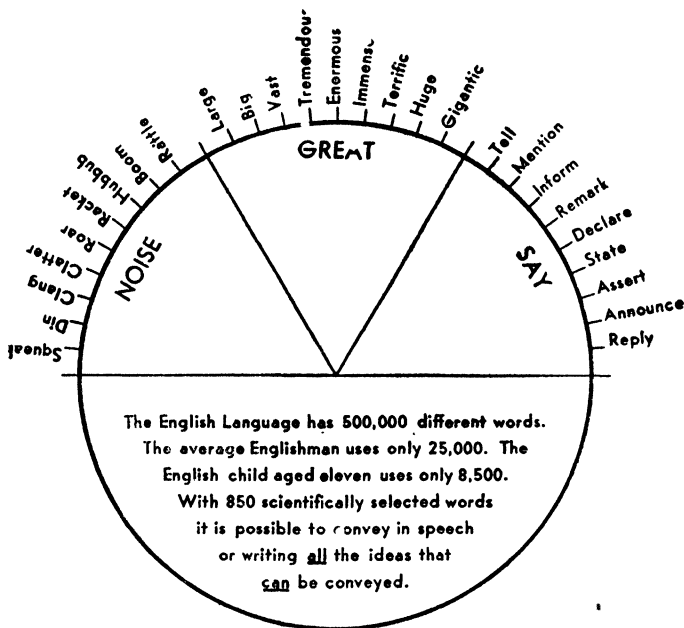


Figure 4. The Concentric Method

once, but rapidly, many many times, picking out from each section words in what might be called their order of diminishing importance, *i.e.*, filling in the detail.

### Basic Simplification

How does this work out in practice? Below are given two different versions of the same 'idea' taken



from two different versions of the *Merchant of Venice* (from Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare*), a story very commonly used in schools. The first (A) is from the original story by Charles Lamb and is usually read by the English child at the age of eleven, with a vocabulary of 8,500 different words (the story itself has a vocabulary of about 10,000 words; some are 'learnt', some are ignored or 'picked up' from the context). The second version (B) is in Basic English and uses a vocabulary of only 850 words.

## A

Shylock the Jew lived at Venice. He was an usurer, who had amassed an immense fortune by lending money at great interest to Christian merchants.

## B

Shylock the Jew had a house in Venice. He was a money-trader. He let Christian traders have the use of his money at a high rate of interest, and in this way • he had become very well-off.

The idea is the same in both versions, but to get the Indian child to a stage where he can read and understand, let alone *use*, words like 'usurer', 'amass', 'immense' and 'fortune' must take at least ten years, so that he would be 17 before he could even attempt to read a story which is commonly read by the English child at the age of 11. On the other hand, the 850 different words used in the Basic version can be taught in a year, so that an Indian child starting to learn English at the age of seven would actually have to be kept back even from the Basic version not because the *vocabulary*

would be difficult but because the *subject-matter* would be too difficult, would be, that is, beyond his range of experience and comprehension.

Here, then, is the reason why the gap between mind-age and word-age tends, in practice, to *decrease* rather than, as it should in theory, *increase*. However bad the technique of English teaching and the books used for the teaching of English have been in the past there has usually been the glimmering of an idea of 'progressive selection'. No teacher would be so stupid as to teach all the words in groups of ten, each of the ten having the same or nearly the same meaning. And whatever progress has been made in the last few years is due wholly to a growing appreciation of the value of selection. The trouble has been that hitherto the idea of progressive selection has not been carried to its logical conclusion, and that no selection has been based on logical or scientific principles. Attempts have been made to select words, but the selections have been based on wrong principles, as will be shown later.

The great contribution of Basic English to the science of language teaching is that it has, for the first time, provided a selection of only 850 words with which it is possible to cover, in reading, speaking and writing, all ideas within the range not only of the child of seven, or eleven, or fifteen, but even of the adult who takes a lively interest in the affairs, political, social, economic, religious, scientific, of the great world in which he lives (see Appendix).

But before we go on to inquire how and why it is possible to do so much with only 850 Basic words,

as compared with other word-lists, let us go back and work out in greater detail what are the advantages offered by such an introduction if we use it in the classroom.

First and foremost there is this fundamental and all-important question of the humiliating gap between mind-age and word-age. Assuming, again for the sake of argument, that the 850 words can be made to do all the work of the 8,500 used by the English child of eleven, and that they can be thoroughly mastered by the Indian child in the four years between seven and eleven, our diagram will now look like this:

ENGLISH CHILD		INDIAN CHILD	
MIND—AGE	WORD—AGE	MIND—AGE	WORD—AGE
7	7	7	—
	(5,000 word start)	•	—
		Λ	—
		⋮	—
			—
			—
		7-year gap	—
			—
		V	○
11	11	11 no gap	11
	(8,500 words)		(850 Basic words)

Figure 5

## Word-Gap Wiped Out

That is to say, in four years the gap has been entirely wiped out, and now it is only a question of *expanding* or *enriching* the vocabulary, as far as possible, up to the same level as that of the English child. In practice experience has shown that it takes much less than four years for the non-English-speaking child to acquire a grasp of the 850 words, so that the gap can be wiped out, and the process of 'expansion' or 'enrichment' can begin, even before the age of eleven.

So far, however, we have ignored the fact that 'knowing' a language is more than a question of knowing a certain number of words. These words have to be used in certain combinations: when used in certain combinations they sometimes change their form. A child could learn the 850 words, parrot-fashion, in a very short time, but he would still be unable to frame a single sentence.

## Practice Makes Perfect

How, then, does an English child learn to combine words in sentences — long before he goes to school? By sheer force of example: he hears certain words used in certain combinations not once but many hundreds of times, and gradually he learns to repeat what he hears. The Indian child, so far as English is concerned, is less fortunate. He hears English, if at all, only in the classroom for a very short period each day. The various situations, in work, play, domestic life, in which the English child is compelled to hear and use words in combination

do not arise in the Indian schoolroom *naturally*; they have to be *artificially* constructed. And not only are the conditions *artificial*, but the number of times the Indian child hears, reads or uses any one word or combination of words is very small compared with the number of times the English child hears, reads and uses that same word or combination of words.

That is to say, learning a language, like learning to ride a bicycle, is almost wholly a matter of *practice*, and the great difficulty of teaching English in a country like India is that there is no time to give the child sufficient practice without stealing time from other important subjects in the curriculum.

It is chiefly because of this difficulty, lack of practice, that the Indian child, even after five years of English, is usually unable to frame a simple sentence without mistakes.

Now we cannot increase the time available for English in an already overcrowded curriculum, but we can ensure at least that the child gets a large amount of practice in the basic forms of the language *before* we make any attempt to enlarge the vocabulary beyond the 850-word level.

Take, for example, the difficulties involved in changing a sentence from direct to indirect speech:

*Direct Speech:* I shall come here again to-morrow.

*Indirect Speech:* He said that he *would go there* again the day after.

As teachers we know that the changes from 'shall' to 'would', 'come' to 'go', 'here' to

'there', and 'to-morrow' to 'the day after' give trouble even after years of drilling. One obvious reason is that all this time the child is being bothered by having to learn to differentiate between such other reporting words for 'say' as:

He *told* me that etc.

He *mentioned* that etc.

He *informed* me that etc.

He *remarked* that etc.

He *declared* that etc.

He *stated* that etc.

and a dozen more besides.

It is because of this confusion that we get such *double* mistakes as:

He replied *me* that he *will* not go there.

### 'One Thing at a Time'

Is it not reasonable then to say that we will exclude all these words, and all other synonyms of the same kind, from the child's practice (reading) material *until* he has first mastered the grammatical changes involved in putting direct into indirect speech? Obviously it is much easier, much less confusing, to drill with the one word 'say' than it is with all or any of a dozen alternatives all serving the same purpose but differing slightly in meaning. In the same way it will be much easier later, when the child has perfected his *constructions*, to go on filling in the 'language-picture' by the addition of more *words*. 'One thing at a time' is a good principle, even in language-teaching.

So that the order of work will be :

- (1) Acquiring a sufficient number of words (850) to enable the learner to read and express all ideas suitable to his 'mind-age.'
- (2) Practice, using no words other than the 850, to enable him to concentrate on mastering the correct forms of expression.
- (3) The filling-in of detail, *i.e.*, addition of more words.

Or, expressed diagrammatically, the horizontal work first, then the vertical:

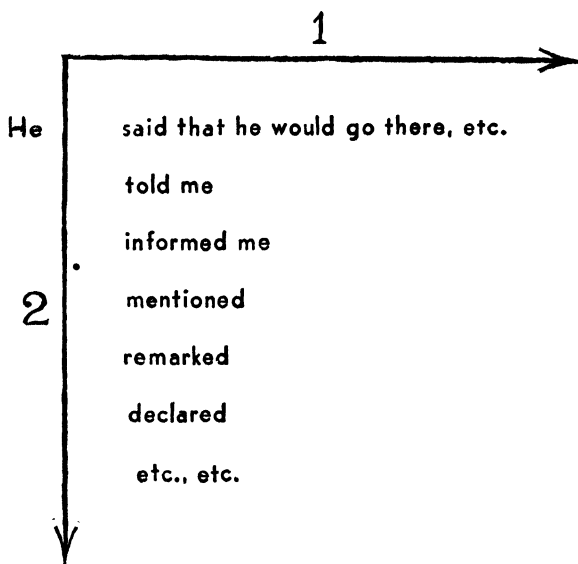


Figure 5a. Order of Work

Why, then, have teachers in the past been so anxious to push on with more and more new words, with which little practice can be given, instead of confining themselves to a much smaller number of words, with which much more practice could be given? Because, as we have seen, they have been anxious to wipe out the gap between mind-age and word-age as quickly as possible; and they have thought that in order to do this it is necessary to teach the Indian child *all*, or nearly all, the words that the English child knows. Because, that is, we have not, as teachers, had the time or the knowledge or the skill to work out a system of 850 words which will do the work of the 8,500 that the English child knows. And because there has been no such system, there has been no reading material in 850 words which would justify the teacher in stopping at that particular level in order that his pupils might get sufficient practice to learn to read easily and speak fluently and correctly, using only those 850 words.

This then is the second advantage which Basic offers to the teacher. With the 850 words of Basic, as a glance at the literature in Basic will show, it is possible for both child and adult to say anything which they are mentally capable of saying, or to read anything in Basic which they are mentally capable of grasping. There are already nearly one hundred books, covering many different branches of *knowledge* as well as fiction, and more are coming out every month (see Appendix).

Now, therefore, instead of going on to teach more and more new words long before his children



have had sufficient practice with the old, the teacher *can* stop at the 850-word level and get his children to read and use only these 850 words until they have had so much practice that they can read and use each one of them, alone or in combination, *as easily and as correctly as the English child reads and uses his 8,500 words*. The contrast between the old way and the new (Basic) way is brought out in Figure 6 on the next page (overleaf).

It will be seen that before the advent of Basic the teacher was forced to go on teaching new words in a steady stream without stopping anywhere for 'practice', simply because there was nothing worthwhile stopping for — there was no reading material using a vocabulary of only 850 words, or even 1,200 words, with which his pupils could 'practice' until they had achieved perfection. More recently, it is true, there have been 'supplementary readers' based on a limited selection of words, but no system has been able to offer more than a few short readers at the 850-word level, and these are at best chiefly fairy stories, *i.e.*, still below the mind-age of the Indian child of eleven, and certainly of no use for increasing *knowledge*.

Even supposing, therefore, that the teacher did stop at this level, which he seldom does, his pupils would get nothing like the amount of practice necessary for perfection: and in any case, the word-list being only a haphazard and not a scientific one, they would still find themselves able to express only a very limited range of ideas.

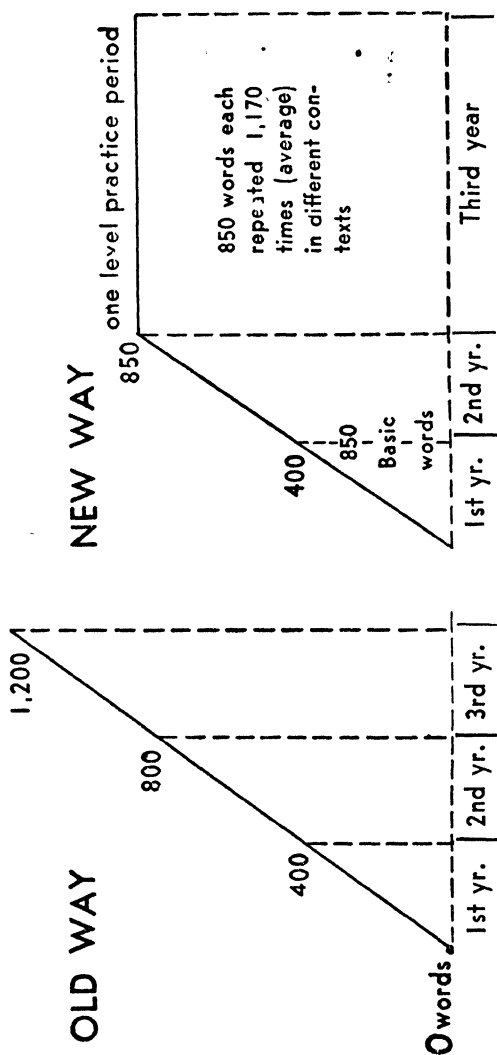


Figure 6. The One-Level Practice Period

## Word-Repetition

Now compare this with the Basic way. The 850 words, let us assume, have been taught in two years. One whole year yet remains during which the child can read, *without meeting any new word*, say forty Basic books containing in all 1,000,000 words (25,000 words to a book).

So we might contrast the two methods like this:—

*Old Method (using four 'supplementary readers')*

$$\text{Average use-frequency of each word} = \frac{100,000}{850} = 117$$

*Basic Way (using 40 reading books)*

$$\text{Average use-frequency of each word} = \frac{1,000,000}{850} = 1170$$

Is it too much to claim that after reading and using each word, on an average, 1,170 times, the child should be able to employ it as freely as the English child?

But, you may say, the 'old-way' pupil has learnt 1,200 words, the Basic pupil only 850 — he has still 350 words to learn before he *catches up*. To which, for the time being, we reply, "Which is better — that the child should be able to read and express himself freely in 850 words that serve all the needs of everyday existence; or that he should fumble and falter with 1,200 words which, because they have been badly chosen, are still insufficient for all the needs of everyday existence?"

## Key to Meanings

But, however crushing that retort may be, it still does not do justice to what we might call the 'genius' of Basic. Let us see what happens when the child, having laid a firm Basic foundation, goes on to expand and enrich his vocabulary. Because the Basic 850 words enable us to talk about all the things we have to talk about they must also enable us to talk about the *names* of all the things we have to talk about. That is, they must also be sufficient to explain and define the meanings of all the other words in the English language. Thus, for the first time, it has been found possible to get out a dictionary (the English-Basic Dictionary) in which the 25,000 most common English words have been explained in terms of 850 words only. Or, referring to Figure 7 (opposite), a dictionary has been got out in which all the words in C—D can be explained and defined using only the words in A—B.

Now as teachers we know that our greatest difficulty in explaining 'new words' is to find simpler ones that all the children will understand perfectly. And because it is so difficult we may be excused if at times we give way to the temptation to use words which we are *not* quite sure our children do understand perfectly. To that extent we merit the criticism of a well-known schools inspector who wrote:

I do not think I am exaggerating when I say that the note-books of the large majority of pupils in our schools will reveal meanings as unfamiliar as, if not more unfamiliar than, the words explained.

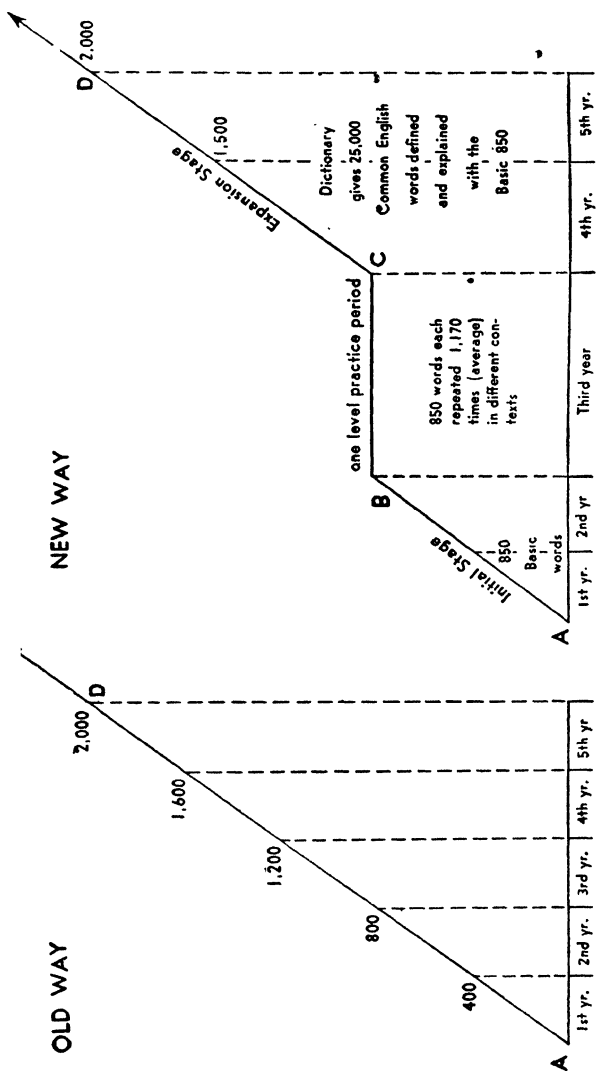


Figure 7. Controlled Expansion

Below is the list of examples which he gives, the words in the right-hand column being those given to explain the new words on the left.

appease	pacify
dig	excavate
allusion	indirect reference
suffers from	is affected by
office	position with duties
flower of youth	bloom of life

And then he goes on to say, "I am afraid these examples may be multiplied a thousand times."

The truth and justice of this criticism cannot be denied. But is it wholly the teacher's fault? As we have said, nothing is more difficult than to find these 'simpler' words, or to be quite certain that even the simplest words will be understood. And why? Because hitherto there has been no definite criterion by which we could say, 'This word is simple; that one is not. This word will be understood; that one will not be understood.' If the teachers have sinned it is because the common dictionaries, on which they must rely for their definitions, are even greater sinners in this respect.

The inspector I have quoted advised teachers to get their pupils accustomed to the use of a suitable dictionary, and recommended *The Little Oxford Dictionary* as one "in which each word is given only in its common meanings." But this is the sort of thing that happens even with *The Little Oxford Dictionary*: the child reads a sentence like:

Shylock was an usurer.

What does 'usurer' mean? He looks up the *Little Oxford* and finds the meaning given as 'one who lends money at exorbitant interest'. No wiser than before he turns to 'exorbitant' and finds it explained as 'grossly excessive', which is also no doubt quite outside the range of his vocabulary. So he is left to puzzle it out as best he can.

This is not the fault of the dictionary. It is a very good dictionary — for English people. But because its 'defining-vocabulary' is not limited it is all but useless to the foreign learner who has not reached a certain stage.

Not every teacher can be a linguistic expert, or a philologist, and so be able to determine which are the best 'defining-words' and which are not.

It is this that the Basic dictionary will do *for* him. He has only to teach the 850 Basic words, the 'defining-words', and the rest is comparatively easy. He need have no doubt that the 'defining-words' are thoroughly understood; not only has he taken two years to teach them, by the most advanced and 'fool-proof' methods, but his children have for a whole year been reading nothing else. They have not only *learnt* the words; they have met each one on an average 1,170 times — and each time in a different context. At last, then, we have a dictionary which is 'safe' — safe for the pupil, safe for the teacher. The teacher will not even have to explain; he will refer his children to their dictionary. Looking up words will be part of their homework — and so much time will be saved in the classroom. In practice, as far as school texts are concerned, neither teacher nor pupil will have even to consult the dictionary, because the pub-

lishers of Basic books promise us a whole library of texts in 'normal' English "in which the sense of any word not in the Basic list will be given in a footnote, in Basic."

### No Selection, No Key

Now let us go back again and compare the position of the 1,200-word learner with that of his Basic school-fellow when it comes to the question of expansion of vocabulary. After painfully struggling to acquire the 1,200 words in one steady stream he still cannot be said to have achieved that perfect command over them which can come only through constantly meeting and using them in different contexts. He has no literature worthy of the name, even at this higher level, no useful books which will *instruct* as well as *amuse* him. But what is even worse is that he has no dictionary to which he can go with the certain knowledge that all the definitions are given within the limits of the 1,200 words that he knows. The only dictionary of this kind which has so far been attempted, other than the Basic one, was to have been based on a defining-list of 1,400 words, but it has been forced to use, in addition, '91 words and 63 usages' plus '357 double-definition words', which the child has not learnt in his A — B period and therefore does not know. Secondly the 1,400 words were not chosen specifically for their powers of definition (the method of selection is described in Chapter 2), and the attempt to use them for definition was bound therefore to result in defects and anomalies (see page 104).

Is it then too much to claim that the 'expansion period' (C — D) of the Basic learner must in the nature of things be far happier, far easier, far more rapid than that of the 1,200-word learner? Even supposing that it does take three years to learn and thoroughly assimilate



the 850 Basic words (as a matter of fact experience has shown that three years are more than sufficient), is it not fair to assume that the ease, rapidity and 'safety' of the expansion period will more than make up for the time lost in the B — C one-level period, and that the Basic learner will *catch up* and pass the non-Basic learner in a very short time after he has passed out of the 'practice stage'?

### Many Levels

There is yet another reason why the teacher is not altogether to blame if, in explaining new words, he makes confusion worse confounded! Often he has not been responsible for the earlier English teaching of the children whom, in any one year, he sees before him. They have come from lower classes or from different schools or even from no school at all. He does not know, or at best has only a vague idea of, the books they have used, that is to say, of the words each individually may be expected to know. Some will know say 500 words, others 1,000, others 1,200 and some perhaps 1,500. Nor is it certain that even the 500 words of those who know least are common to all. How then can he frame an explanation which is *certain* to be understood by all?

If, on the other hand, every primary or preparatory school satisfied itself by giving a thorough grounding in the Basic system, every upper-school teacher would know on what basis he could go to work in explaining words. In the two diagrams overleaf, the teacher at the centre of the circle on the left would have to be forgiven if he failed to give 'commonly-understood' explanations; for the teacher at the centre of the circle on the right there could be no excuse!

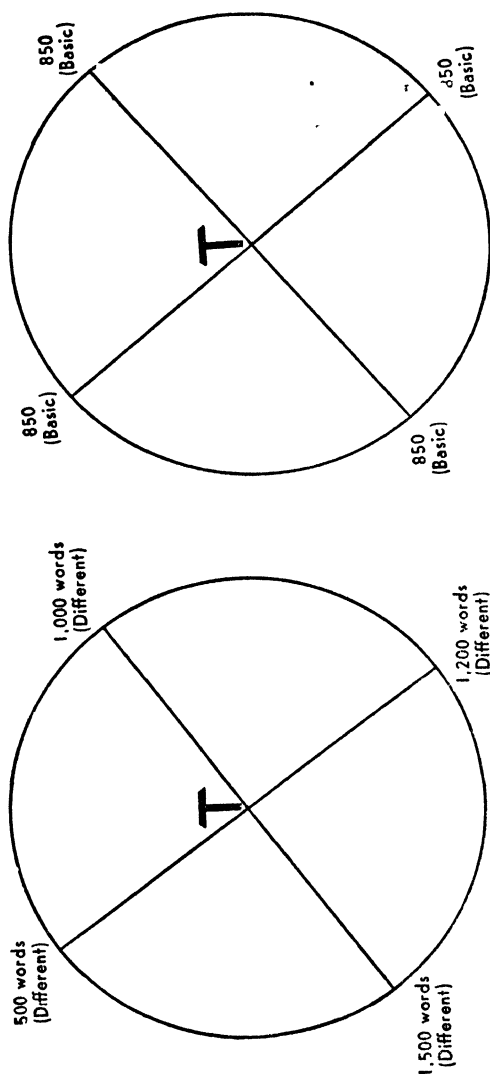


Figure 8. The Value of Uniformity

## Safety for the Teacher

In referring to the inestimable value of the English-Basic dictionary I said it would be 'safe' for the pupil — *and* for the teacher! This suggests yet another reason why the Indian teacher of English, once he has grasped the nature and implications of Basic, will welcome it with open arms. The English Grammar Committee set up by the Burmese Secondary Schools Board, referring to the use of the 'direct method' in language-teaching, says in its report "...we must face the following facts:—

- (1) "that many of our teachers do not speak English fluently nor think fluently in English.
- (2) "that English is a foreign language both to the pupils and the teachers."

The same might be said, with even greater truth, of English teachers of French in England, or of French teachers of English in France. It is a difficulty which language teachers all the world over have to face. But if we may justly hope that a one- or two-year one-level Basic practice period will do for the Indian child what an English environment does for the English child (*i.e.*, create a 'natural' fluency), may we not also be justified in hoping that it will give the teacher too an opportunity to start 'thinking in English'? In drilling his children on the 850 words he has necessarily to drill himself. Will it not therefore give him an opportunity to correct the mistakes and repair the deficiencies resulting from his own haphazard and unsystematic learning of English? Even if Basic does not do all this for the

teacher, it will at least narrow down the scope for error which he cannot but 'pass on' to his pupils. In diagrammatic form:

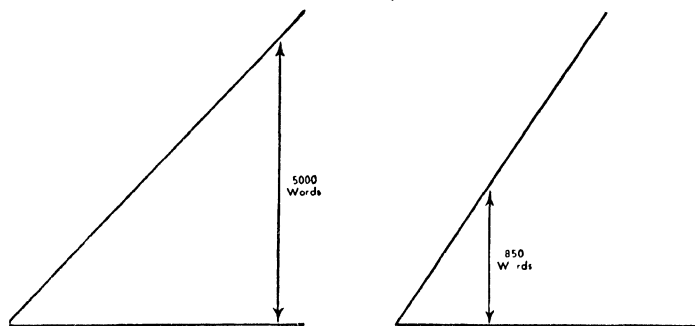


Figure 9. The Scope for Error

The angle is the same but the scope for error has been reduced to less than four-fifths the size. And, as every teacher knows, accuracy in the early stages of language-learning is all-important. "There is no doubt," says the educationist I have already quoted, "that inaccuracy in the middle and higher stages in the 'use of simple English, which is so common in school, is largely the result of inaccuracy in the early stages. The acquirement of the command of a language is a habit-forming process, and if habits of accuracy are not inculcated at the outset, it will be most difficult to inculcate them later on and to eradicate habits of inaccuracy."

### Surrender Value

I shall refer again to the question of accuracy, in connection with the one-level period, in a later chapter. Meanwhile I want to link it up with yet another aspect

of Basic that deserves consideration even in this very sketchy introduction. Every Indian teacher has probably heard of the recent parents' demonstration in Rangoon, the object of which was to demand the dismissal of the English teacher in a certain municipal school on the ground that the children learnt no English that was useful to them and the appointment was therefore an unjustifiable expense.

Certainly in the one or two years at his disposal the teacher could hardly be expected to do much. But it is equally certain that if, instead of teaching the 850 badly chosen words of an out-of-date reader, he had taught Basic, he could have done much more. That is to say, he could have provided his pupils with an English which, because it is complete in itself, they could in fact have *used* and would therefore have found useful. They could have gone on by themselves to read without difficulty any of the extensive Basic literature available, which in itself is well worth while. They would have obtained a key by which, with the help of the English-Basic dictionary, they could, if they wished, have gone on, by themselves, to expand their vocabulary and get control of 'complete' English.

Look at the child climbing the word ladder on the left in Figure 10 (overleaf). He has learnt, let us say, 850 words. Now, for one reason or another, he has to stop. Because the 850 words were badly chosen they are useless to him; they have led him nowhere. He is faced with a blank wall. Soon he will have forgotten them; the time and energy spent on teaching and learning them is therefore just so much, as the parents asserted, 'waste'! Now look at the boy climbing the word ladder

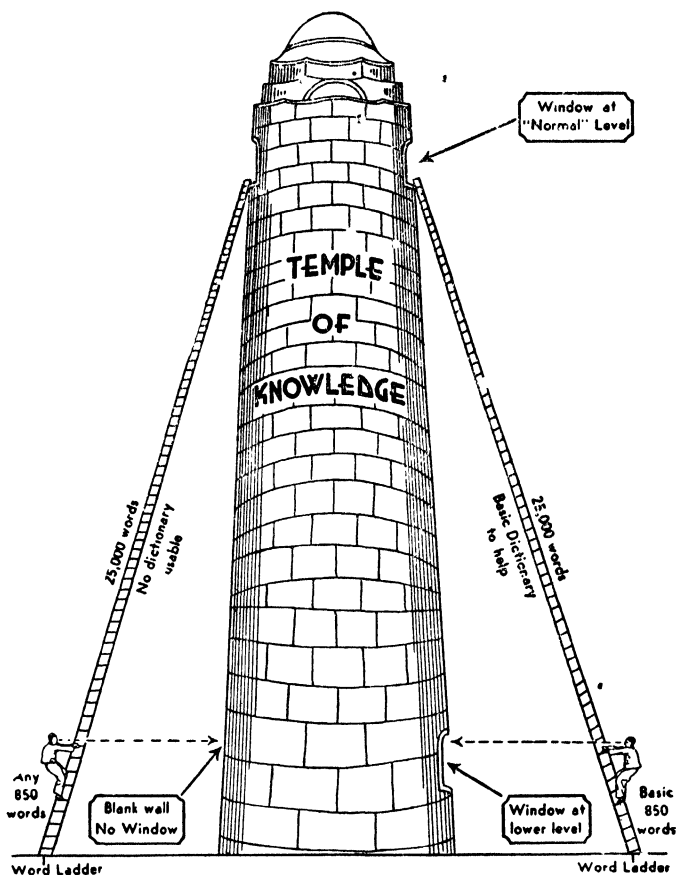


Figure 10. The Word Ladder

on the right. He has learnt Basic. He too, for one reason or another, has to stop. But at least he has 'reached a window, at a lower level, through which he

can see into the Temple of Knowledge; and may we not hope that what he sees there will encourage and inspire him to climb still higher, with the help of the English-Basic dictionary, even though he has no teacher at hand?

Hence Basic is particularly useful in primary schools where the English course is limited to one or two years, and in all schools where pupils tend to 'drop off' in large numbers before reaching higher standards.

### The Basic Way

We have seen then that all the great advantages of Basic English over other introductions to English derive from the fact that it is complete in itself, covers the whole range of ideas, answers all the needs of everyday existence, does all the work of the 25,000 words or more which the average English adult uses in his work and play. At the same time it is English, and cannot be distinguished from 'normal' or 'complete' English except by the expert. It therefore enables us to say to our pupils:

"You are beginning to learn English seven years later than the English child. We cannot hope, in the limited time we can give to English in school, to teach you *all* the words the English child has already learnt and will learn as he gets older. But we will teach you first a certain number of English words with which you will be able to say and write all the things that the English child wishes and is able to say and write. After that we will use what time there is left to increase your stock of words, so that you may have a choice of four or five words, instead of being limited to one, to describe any particular thing or idea. What happens after

that is your own affair. We shall give you all the English words you *need* to know; we shall show you the way to get hold of all the other words you would *like* to know. More than that, in an Indian school, we cannot do."

If we are in fact able to say that then we have solved the great problem of English teaching in the East. In countries like India, where a knowledge of English is not a luxury but a vital necessity, there is a great temptation to many parents and teachers to devote more and more time to it at the expense of the mother-tongue and 'general knowledge' subjects. To succumb to this temptation is a tragic mistake from any point of view. In the end the child does not know English properly, does not know the mother-tongue properly, gets no firm foundation of knowledge. Education, in the real sense of the word, is sacrificed on the altar of a foreign tongue. All this is now a thing of the past. Basic not only offers a simple key to the English language; it makes possible a more rational, more balanced, more self-respecting educational system in general.

So let us now go on to inquire how and why it is possible to do so much with only 850 words. Hitherto, for the sake of simplicity, I have passed over those other features which make Basic more than a mere list of words, which make it a complete language system in itself, the simplest the world has ever known. To appreciate the genius of Basic to the full we must compare it with the word-lists with which it is so often, though mistakenly, confused.



## CHAPTER 2

### SELECTION BY COUNTING

I have said that any improvement there may have been in the teaching of English in India in recent years is due mainly to this idea of word-selection. Because our children begin late and have little time for English we cannot hope to teach them all the words the English child knows and will learn as he grows up. Fortunately, however, as we have seen, not *all* the words the English child uses to express himself are necessary; and by choosing those which *are* necessary, and by teaching those first, we can make our work much simpler.

The importance of word-selection should indeed no longer need stressing at all. Even Government education departments, which are naturally slow to give a lead, are now coming to acknowledge its value. Thus the Burmese Campbell Committee Report, in its recommendations concerning the teaching of English (page 215), says:

We suggest that the course in English in these (Vernacular and Anglo-vernacular) schools should be based on Dr. West's (*New Method*) system or the 'Faucett' (*Oxford English Course*) system or the system called Basic English...

There follows a reservation with regard to Basic which need not bother us at the moment. What is important to realize is that by one stroke of the pen the

Committee has in this way dismissed as unsuitable or unsatisfactory all those other courses or Readers which are still in common use in Burma. It has, by implication, made two lists of books, one of which it advocates, one of which it rejects, as follows:

<i>Recommended</i>	<i>Not Recommended</i>
New Method	Dagon Readers
Oxford English Course	Hodges' <i>English Readers</i>
Basic English (?)	Direct English Readers
	Koh-i-Noor Readers
	New India Readers, etc, etc.

What is the basis on which the Campbell Committee has made this 'invidious distinction', this 'odious comparison'? It is none other than word-selection. The courses in the left-hand column are all based on 'minimum vocabularies'; those on the right make no attempt at word-selection of any kind. They assume that the pupil is in fact going on to learn the whole range of English vocabulary and idiom; they imply that therefore the order in which he learns all the different words and idioms which he will sooner or later have to learn is not important. They make no provision whatsoever for one-level practice; there is no possibility of scientific expansion later. Thus in Hodges Book 3, Page 45, we find words like 'tattered', 'forlorn', 'crumpled', 'malt' etc., which the pupil is forced to learn long before he has learnt even to pass the simplest remark about the weather. The futility of all this, as we have seen, has at last been recognized. The question now is: Which of the three

systems recommended in the Campbell Committee Report is the best.

### Basic v. 'The Rest'

Because it is based on entirely different principles we may at once take out Basic and range it against the other two, which might well be joined by other systems closely allied with them in method. We thus have a fresh division the reasons for which, though not yet officially recognized, will become clearer as we go on.

<i>Frequency System</i>	<i>Elimination System</i>
Palmer's <i>1000-Word English</i> (1000 words)	Basic English (850 words)
West's <i>New Method</i> (1400 words)	
Faucett's <i>Oxford Course</i> (2500 words)	
Tipping's <i>Rapid Readers</i> (5000 words)	

Against each system is written the number of words contained in its 'minimum vocabulary'. It is now my task to show in what ways Basic differs, apart from the difference in the number of words, from the systems listed in the left-hand column.

### The Four Criteria

But first it might be as well to lay down the criteria by which we may judge the value of any word-list put forward as a 'minimum vocabulary'. From the conclusions reached in Chapter I it is clear that the best

word-list will be that which is, at one and the same time,

1. The shortest in length.
2. The simplest to teach.
3. The widest in covering power.
4. The most stable in content.

Or, reverting to our diagram,

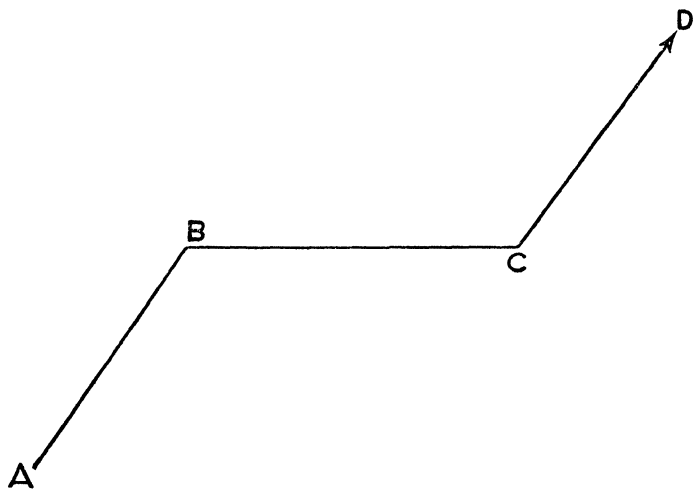


Figure 11. The Organized Method

1. The length of the line AB (learning stage) will depend on the number of words in the list and the ease with which they may be taught. The shorter this line is, the sooner we shall be able to get on to the one-level 'plateau', where the pupil achieves fluency and accuracy through repetition.

2. The length of the line BC (practice stage) will depend on the amount and kind of reading material

available in the vocabulary represented by the line AB. Two books would not be enough; twenty books of fairy stories would be a waste of time for all and to many a weariness of the flesh. What is wanted is a large number of different books on a large number of different subjects of definite educational value. These will be available only if the vocabulary is 'wide' enough or sufficiently 'elastic' to cover all essential ideas.

3. The length of the line CD (expansion stage) will depend on the value of the word-list as a 'defining-instrument'. There are some words which are essential for the definition of other words. The larger the number of such words in the list the more useful it will be.

4. Finally, from this point of view, there cannot be two or more different lists which are equally good. There must be, either in existence or yet to be created, an 'absolute' list which cannot be improved upon. The closer any word-list approaches this 'absolute' the longer it is likely to stand the test of time. We do not want to be constantly changing the list we are working with; 'stability' is a factor which must therefore be taken into consideration.

So, armed with these four criteria, how shall we set about selecting our word-list? How, that is, are we to decide which are in fact the most necessary words for the pupil to learn first?

### The 'Common-Word' Principle

As we have said, Basic is not the first 'minimum vocabulary' to be selected for school purposes. There have been other attempts, and those who have made these attempts (Thorndike — *Teacher's Word-List*; Michael

West — *New Method Readers*; Faucett — *Oxford English Course*; Palmer — *Thousand-Word English*; Tipping — *Rapid Readers*, etc.) went about it in this way:

In speaking or writing [they said] there are some words which we use every day of our lives (words like 'the', 'and', 'in'); there are other words which we use, on an average, say only once a week, or once a month, or once a year, or perhaps hardly at all (words like 'quill' or 'urn' or 'vat').

Obviously, therefore, we should first teach the words which the Englishman himself uses most frequently, because these are the words the foreign learner is *most likely to need* to understand English and to use in speaking it. That is to say, the most *necessary* words are the most *common* words. How, then, are we to find out which are the most *common* words?

The ideal way would be to follow an Englishman round all day for many days listening carefully to what he says and counting up the number of times he uses each particular word. We cannot do that (the Englishman might object!) but what we can do is to take some of the reading-matter the average Englishman turns to most frequently (books, newspapers, letters, etc.) and count up the number of times each word is used there. Then, as this reading-matter must be a fairly good reflection of the Englishman's own word habits, we shall have a fairly good idea which words he himself uses most frequently.

The first to do this was Edward L. Thorndike, an American Professor of Education. In 1921 he published a list of 10,000 words which were found to occur most frequently in a selection of reading material containing

in all about 4,500,000 words (an average-length novel runs to about 80,000 words) from 41 sources (children's stories, the Bible, different text-books, etc.).

In the latest edition of Thorndike's *Teacher's Word-List* the list is extended to include 20,000 words, and is based on a word-count of 5,000,000 more words from 200 sources. We are told, for example, that the word

the	<i>comes in the</i>			1st	500	words.
thee	„	„	„	2nd	500	„
term	„	„	„	3rd	500	„
theft	„	„	„	7th	1000	„
theology	„	„	„	8th	1000	„
tetanus	„	„	„	13th	1000	„
thermos	„	„	„	17th	1000	„
terse	„	„	„	19th	1000	„
terrorize	„	„	„	20th	1000	„

Once you have grasped the idea the first fundamental defect of the 'word-counting' system of word-selection at once becomes apparent.

### Arbitrary Selection

Look, for example, at the word 'tetanus' in the 13th thousand. Perhaps it has already occurred to you that you might read a hundred books, containing not four but eight million words, and never come across this word at all! On the other hand, if you were reading books of a certain kind, say about medicine, you would probably meet this word much more frequently than the word 'theology' (8th thousand). And is it true, we wonder, to say that the average man uses the word 'tetanus' so much more frequently than 'terse', or 'thermos', or 'terrorize'?

Clearly, apart from a few common words ('the', 'in', etc.), which are found in all books, word-frequency must depend entirely on the *kind* of books, newspapers, letters, etc., selected as a basis for the word-count. It was because Thorndike himself realized this that he brought out the 'revised' list based on additional material. There were others, however, who were still not satisfied with his choice of material. These got out lists of their own, and in 1934 an attempt was made by all the principal word-counters (Thorndike, Faucett, Palmer, West and some others), working together, to adjust and dovetail the lists they had worked out alone. Their combined efforts resulted in what is known as *The Interim Report on Vocabulary Selection*—'interim' because the list is still open to revision in the light of the criticisms made by any teacher or educationist who cares to make them.

For the time being, however, this is the most up-to-date and authoritative frequency word-list available. Here are 22 words, with their order of frequency, taken from the *Interim Report*, and two words not listed at all (as being too uncommon).

### The Interim Report on Vocabulary Selection

('The' = Common Word No. 1)

in	7	big	269	obtain	825
go	66	speak	290	sew	984
great	89	enter	459	merchant	1444
say	99	report	487	shut	1724
get	105	close	Th. 1a	thread	2009
tell	136	express	522	needle	2904
state	176	mention	672	trader	(not listed)
large	205	doctor	764	medical	(not listed)



Instead of being told, as in Thorndike's word-list, that 'the', for example, is in the first 500, we are now given more precise information. We learn that it is the most common word in the English language — Common Word No. 1.

### 'Necessary' not Defined

That is all to the good, but we still have to note, in passing, another defect which all these lists, ancient or modern, individual or combined, share in common. Everyone will agree that 'in' is a more common word than 'medical', and should therefore be taught before 'medical'. We are told which words are *more* necessary and which are *less* necessary. But where shall we draw the line between *necessary* and *unnecessary*?

What are we really looking for? Let us go back again to our four criteria. What we want, we have said, is a list of words which, having been learnt, will enable the pupil to have a long period of one-level practice in the fundamental grammatical constructions, unhampered by the necessity of having to learn more and more new words.

The *shorter* the list, the *sooner* we shall be able to get on to the one-level plateau where the children will learn first to walk steadily and then to run. The more work the words can do (*i.e.*, the more adequate they are to express all our needs) the more *numerous* and more *varied* will be the books we can use in the one-level period. The greater their defining-power, the easier will be the task of expansion when we come to that stage.

In other words, we want to know where the line AB should end and where the line BC should begin;

the crucial point is the point of departure for BC. Symbolically,

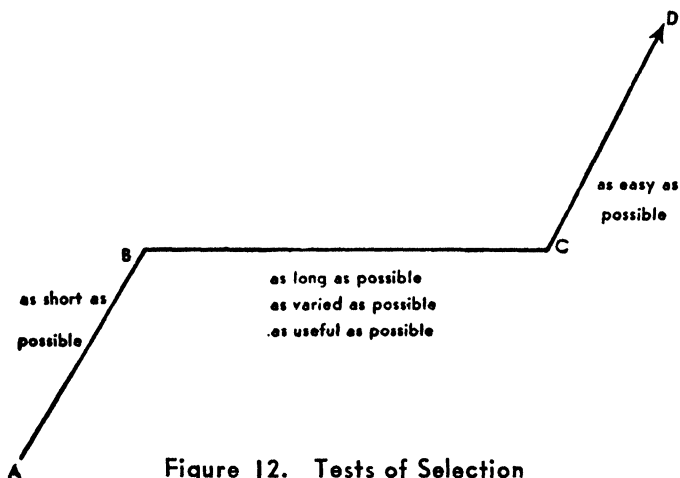


Figure 12. Tests of Selection

How does all this word-counting help us to say which words are *necessary* for practice, for expansion, and which are *unnecessary*? Suppose, for example, we 'draw the line' after the first 1,000 words. Then we shall have 'sew' (984) but not the things with which we sew — 'thread' (2,009) and 'needle' (2904)! We find in fact that although the word-counters may be agreed as to which words are *more* necessary and which are *less* necessary they are *not* agreed as to which are definitely necessary for the purposes symbolised in our diagram. Palmer (*1000-Word English*) draws the line at 1000, West (*New Method*) at 1400, Faucett (*Oxford Course*) at 2500, Tipping (*Rapid Readers*) at 5000 and so on. Later we shall see (a very important point) how many books and what kind of books each

of these systems offers for the one-level practice period. For the time being, let us go back and examine afresh the list of words on page 60.

We have already noted two grave defects, which the *Interim Report* shares in common with Thorndike's list and all such lists. They are:

1. We have no guide as to which words are necessary, and which unnecessary, for the purposes of practice and expansion. That is to say, the length of the line AB, and the point of departure for BC, are left quite indefinite.

2. The *order* of frequency depends entirely on the particular selection of word-counting material that any particular individual, or body of individuals, cares to make. *You* might make one selection; *I* might make another. Our results would then be, apart from a few words, quite different. Can then any list based on word-counting even hope to approximate to the 'absolute'? In the first place, wherever we draw the line, the vocabulary included above it cannot be said to be complete in itself; it is only part of a much larger vocabulary. Secondly, the order of words will change every time anybody cares to make a new selection of material. As Palmer, one of the principal collaborators in the drawing up of the *Interim Report*, himself says, "Such quantitative objective statistics are not as reliable as might appear at first sight. . . . Much depends on the original selection of literary material." And he goes on to say that in working out *Thousand-Word English* the method adopted was partly subjective (*i.e.*, go-as-you-please) partly objective (*i.e.*, word-counting) and partly empirical (or experimental).

So much for the *stability* of all word-lists based on counting. Now we are in a position to note four further defects.

## I. 'Formal' and 'Speaking' Words

Let us look at the two words 'close' (Th. 1a) and 'shut' (1724). In most contexts these two words are interchangeable. Is it a fact that 'close' is more than three times more popular among Englishmen than 'shut'? Any Englishman, after a moment's reflection, will tell you that, on the contrary 'shut' is by far the more common of the two. The English child will say "I've shut the door" long before he learns to say "I've *closed* the door," and, in speaking at least, this habit persists throughout life. Why then is 'close' ranked so much higher than 'shut'? Have the word-counters been cheating? Not necessarily. The clue to the riddle is given in the phrase just used — 'in speaking'. In speaking the Englishman *tends* to use a different set of words from those he uses in writing. When he is writing he feels he must, so to speak, 'be on his best behaviour'. What he has written will be a permanent record of his literary ability. In writing, therefore, he will *tend* to use the formal word instead of the speaking word. He will tend to use, for example,

close	<i>instead of</i>	shut
proceed	" "	go
cease	" "	stop
sufficient	" "	enough
remove	" "	take away
summon	" "	send for

Now material which is *to be read* is material which *has been written*. It stands to reason, therefore, that a word-count based on reading material will favour the words which are used in writing rather than those words with the same meaning which are used in speaking. So that, working on this principle, our children will get a *reading* vocabulary rather than a *speaking* vocabulary. Actually all authorities on the writing of English (*e.g.* Fowler, *King's English*, p. 16) advise even the Englishman, in his writing, to prefer the short word to the long word, the Saxon word to the Romance word, the spoken word ('send for') to the formal word ('summon'). Thus the foreign learner following a course based on these word-lists is being taught to use words which are not only wrong (unidiomatic) for speaking, but also wrong (from a stylistic point of view) for writing, according to the best English authorities.

## 2. Synonyms

What, however, is perhaps even worse is that he is being needlessly confused, at a stage when confusion is most undesirable, with two words which have exactly the same meaning. Suppose, like Faucett, we 'draw the line' at the 2,500th word. Then we shall include both 'close' and 'shut' (found also in the *New Method* 1400 words, though according to the list 'shut' should not be). And if we look more closely at the list on Page 60 we find, even in the first 1,000 words, other groups of two or more words with the same meaning. Thus we have not only 'get' (105) but also 'obtain' (825); we have not only 'great' (89) but also 'large' (205) and 'big' (269); we have not only 'say' (99) but also:

tell	..	136
state	..	176
speak	..	290
report	..	407
express	..	522
mention	..	670

so that all these must be included and are in fact included in the courses (mentioned above) based on these word-lists.

Why, again going back to first principles, have we set our faces so sternly against the introduction of synonyms, words with the same or nearly the same meaning, in this preliminary stage? Not only because it is making our list longer than it need be, and so needlessly delaying our arrival at the one-level plateau; not only because it means less repetition of each individual word when we are *on* the plateau; not only because the inclusion of every additional synonym, in a restricted list, means that some other idea has to go entirely unrepresented and uncovered; but chiefly because synonyms are *confusing* — they are difficult to teach, difficult to learn; they interfere with what is our chief job at this particular stage, which is to 'hammer in' the fundamental grammatical constructions, to lay a grammatical foundation on which, later, storey can be added to storey with perfect **safety**.

### 3. Singles

But once we begin to look in the word-lists for synonyms we shall find them in plenty. And chiefly because the counting of single words leaves entirely out of

account what is one of the most remarkable features of the English language, a feature which, rightly exploited, can make the teaching of English much simpler and easier than it would otherwise be. What is this feature? It is the genius of English for putting together a very small number of simple words to cover the meanings of a very great number of difficult words. Thus, in the list, we have 'in' (7) and 'go' (66). There is nothing, in this presentation, to indicate that used together they mean exactly the same as 'enter', which in this sense becomes a synonym which not only *can* be but *must* be, if we are to avoid confusion, eliminated. And so it is with all those verbs (over 3,000 in number) which combine two or more ideas in one word (*e.g.* fatigue = make tired).

These are the chief of the simple words:

*Operators*

*Directives*

come	take	against	on
get	be	among	over
go	do	at	through
give	have	before	to
keep	say	between	under
let	see	by	up
make	send	down	with
put	may	from	of
seem	will	in	about
		off	across

<i>Thus instead of</i>	climb	<i>we can say</i>	go up, get up
" "	precede	" "	go in front of
" "	summon	" "	send for
" "	remove	" "	take away
" "	insert	" "	put in

and so on.

Not only *can* say but *do* say! What Englishman, other than the pedant, talks of 'preceding' his friend, 'summoning' the doctor, 'removing' his belongings, or 'inserting' his key in the door?

The question is not whether, in this preliminary stage, we are to teach *either* 'go in' or 'enter'. The question is whether we should teach *both* 'go in' and 'enter'. All the courses based on frequency lists set out to teach *both*, quite indiscriminately. Basic is alone in saying: 'go' and 'in' are 'foundation' words; 'enter' is a 'luxury' word. Only when the children have learnt how to use 'go' and 'in' in the proper constructions will we go on to teach them the equivalent 'enter'. And so with all words of this kind that are not to be found in the Basic list.

But 'operators' and 'directives' are not the only possible combinations. 'Play-room' or 'children's-room' are combinations which might be used instead of 'nursery' in any context in which 'nursery' is used. In the *New Method Readers*, which are presumably constructed on the frequency principle, we find not only 'child' (504) and 'play' (257) and 'room' (252) but also 'nursery', taught as the 490th word. What justification can there be, we may ask, for the inclusion of 'nursery' in a list which does not contain such simple and necessary words as 'soap', 'shelf' and 'steam'?

#### 4. Secondaries

But we have yet to discuss what is perhaps the greatest of all the defects of word-counting. Look at 'doctor' (764) and the related word 'medical' (which



is not listed at all). No one will deny that 'doctor' is more often on the lips of the Englishman than 'medical'. It is indeed the more *common* word. But is it the more *useful* word? Let us suppose we have already in our list such words as

man	store
book	control
knowledge	authority
system	apparatus

Put 'medical' in front of each one of these and you get each time an equivalent, or alternative, for a new word (which can therefore be dispensed with) or a new idea for which there is no other word. Thus:

medical man	doctor
medical book	treatise
medical knowledge	medicine (as a science)
medical store	pharmacy
medical system	—
medical control	—
medical authority	—
medical apparatus	—

Could 'doctor' be used for 'medical' in these different contexts? Hardly! If then we include 'doctor' and exclude 'medical' a whole range of ideas must go uncovered. Which, then is the more *useful* word — for expansion, for definition?

The same may be said of 'merchant' (1444) and 'trader', also not listed. Here are some of the other words in the group to which these belong:

monger, hawker, dealer, broker, retailer

The word we choose will have to cover all these. Will 'merchant' do? No one would call a 'hawker', for example, a 'merchant' of any sort. But we might, if pressed, call him a 'smallgoods trader' or a 'walking trader'.

## The New Method Dictionary

Here then we have, in theory at least, six grave defects of word-selection based on word-counting. How may we best see them exemplified in practice? We saw in Chapter I (page 40) that one great advantage of a 'minimum vocabulary' is that, having been taught, it gives us a 'defining-list' which can be used, ever after, to *explain* all the more difficult words we shall meet in our expansion period; it gives us a standard of simplicity we need never transgress. Of all the word-counters mentioned only one (Dr. West) has so far had the courage to put his minimum list to the supreme test, that is, to use it as a defining-list for all other words.

His list contains not 850 but 1,400 words. These 1,400 words are taught in *New Method Readers IA-V*. Now when Dr. West sat down to write his Dictionary (the *New Method Readers* were already in use) he found he was unable to get on without "91 words and 63 usages not yet taught to a pupil of *Readers IA-V*." These words, though "not yet taught," are included in the Defining-List which is issued along with the Dictionary. To enable us to distinguish them they are printed in black type.

In addition there are 357 'double-definition' words, that is, "words introduced and defined in order to define some other word."

*e.g.* "nudge — to touch or push with the *elbow*  
(= middle joint of the arm)"

'Elbow' is one of the 'double-definition' words, some of which, we are told, "are used ten or twenty times, but not so often as to make them worthy of inclusion among the 1,490 essential items."

Here are a few of the 448 (91 plus 357) 'uncommon' words not taught in *New Method Readers IA-V*:

bank	female	metal
bitter	fold	nail
brain	hammer	ornament
card	heap	toe
chalk	hook	chin
cheap	hospital	button
clever	ink	shelf
cotton	male	soap

To say that the value of such a dictionary is greatly diminished for any one attempting to use it without knowing nearly 500 words of this type is to state the obvious. Are we surprised by the omission of such words? Not when we remember we have some 110 verbs, weak and strong, *in addition to* their simpler components, six words for 'say', three words for 'great' and a large number of word-groups of the same kind. As Palmer says (in his introduction to *Thousand-Word English*).

.....if a First-reader vocabulary is to be limited, as it necessarily must be, then every word included in it causes another word to be excluded from it; for a bushel measure cannot contain more than a bushel, and this is the crux of the whole matter.

The defects of *word-counting* will be still clearer when we go on, in the next chapter, to study the Basic method of *word-elimination*. .

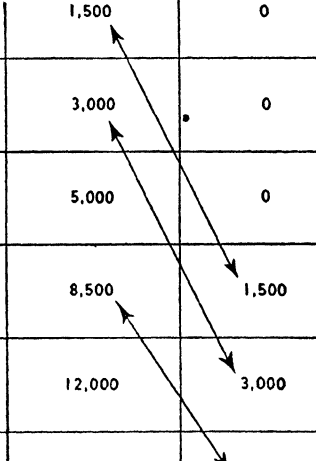
## CHAPTER 3

### SELECTION BY ELIMINATION

Before we discuss the Basic *method* of word-selection by elimination let us return once more to the *purposes* of word-selection.

The fundamental difficulty of English teaching in India is again brought out in the following table:

At the age of	Vocabulary of English-Speaker (English words)	Vocabulary of English-Learner (English words)	The Difference is
0	0	0	0
3	1,500	0	1,500
5	3,000	0	3,000
7	5,000	0	5,000
11	8,500	1,500	7,000
15	12,000	3,000	9,000
21	25,000	8,500	16,500



The diagram consists of two parallel diagonal arrows pointing from the top-left to the bottom-right. The first arrow starts at the value 1,500 in the 'Vocabulary of English-Speaker' column at age 3 and points to the value 1,500 in the 'Vocabulary of English-Learner' column at age 11. The second arrow starts at the value 3,000 in the 'Vocabulary of English-Speaker' column at age 5 and points to the value 3,000 in the 'Vocabulary of English-Learner' column at age 15. These arrows illustrate that the learner's vocabulary is significantly behind the speaker's vocabulary at every stage shown.

Figure 13. The Word Gap

We see that the word-level of the Indian child of eleven, assuming that he has learnt 1,500 words in four years, corresponds with the word-level of the English child of three. In order that it should correspond in covering-power with the word-level of the English child of eleven we have to make a *selection* of essential words from among the 8,500 that the English child knows. If our selection can be made in such a way as to cover the more abstract ideas familiar to the average English University graduate (age 21) so much the better.

Suppose that on the line AB (Fig. 14) there are 25,000 dots, each one representing one of the 25,000 words which are in fairly common use among educated Englishmen.

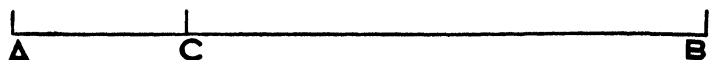


Figure 14. Division of Words

We want to divide this line AB into two sections, AC and CB, and we want the division to be such that when we have made it we shall be able to say:

1. With the words in AC we can express any idea that could be expressed using all the words in AB.
2. Any word in CB can be defined or explained using only the words in AC. AC, that is, represents our minimum vocabulary.

The question is: How long must AC be in relation to CB? How many words must it contain? What sort of words must they be?

We have already seen (page 67) how by combining 18 simple verbs with 20 simple prepositions we can get equivalents for about 3,000 common verbs. Here are a few more examples showing how many combinations can be made with the one word 'go':

go against (break) the law  
go against (attack) an army  
go from (leave) the church  
go from view (disappear)  
go into (examine) a question  
go off (elope) with a lover  
go on (ride) a horse  
go to bed (retire)  
go with (accompany) a friend

We may say at once therefore that the 38 words like 'go' and 'in' belong to AC, while the 3,000 verbs, like 'retire' and 'accompany', whose places they can take, may be eliminated from our minimum vocabulary and kept in CB. Because we are certain that we can replace them with AC words we can also be certain that when, later on, we meet them in the expansion stage we shall be able to explain them with AC words. This, in essence, is the Basic method of elimination. We examine each word in the dictionary and decide whether we can or cannot do without it. If we *can* do without it—it is a CB word; if we *cannot*—it is an AC word.

### Panoptic Conjugation

But in order to do this scientifically some objective method was required which would show at a glance the relationship between each word and other words

for which it might be substituted. The method invented is known as Panoptic Conjugation or Panoptic Elimination (panoptic—see at a glance). The Panoptic Eliminator is a chart in the form of a small circle with a number of lines going out from it like the rays of a starfish to the circumference of a larger circle. Figure 15 (opposite) shows a simplified form of the chart.

Each of the 12 lines stands for a relationship such as space, time, magnitude, etc. The word to be treated is placed in the inner circle and is studied from the point of view of each relationship. For example, if the word 'dog' is in the middle: What is another name, we ask, for a dog in connection with Time? Answer: Puppy (young dog). So we put 'puppy' at the end of the Time line, and we say: Clearly, if we have the word 'dog', and the connection with Time is covered by 'young', the word 'puppy' will not be needed; it can therefore be eliminated. The question 'What is a puppy?' is answered fully and readily by 'a young dog' on the line marking the Time-relation. The same will be true of 'bitch', in relation to (sex) Behaviour, if we have *female* in our Basic list. And when our range of questions is complete, we have a complete picture of the word in relation to all the other words in the language which have a connection with it.

Thus, again, we might ask 'What is another name for a table in connection with Use?' Answer: 'Desk'. So we put 'desk' at the end of the Use line and say: If we have 'table' and the connection with Use is covered by 'writing' the word 'desk' will not be needed; it can therefore be eliminated.

If, that is to say, for everyday needs, the word in the inner circle, used with the words on the joining



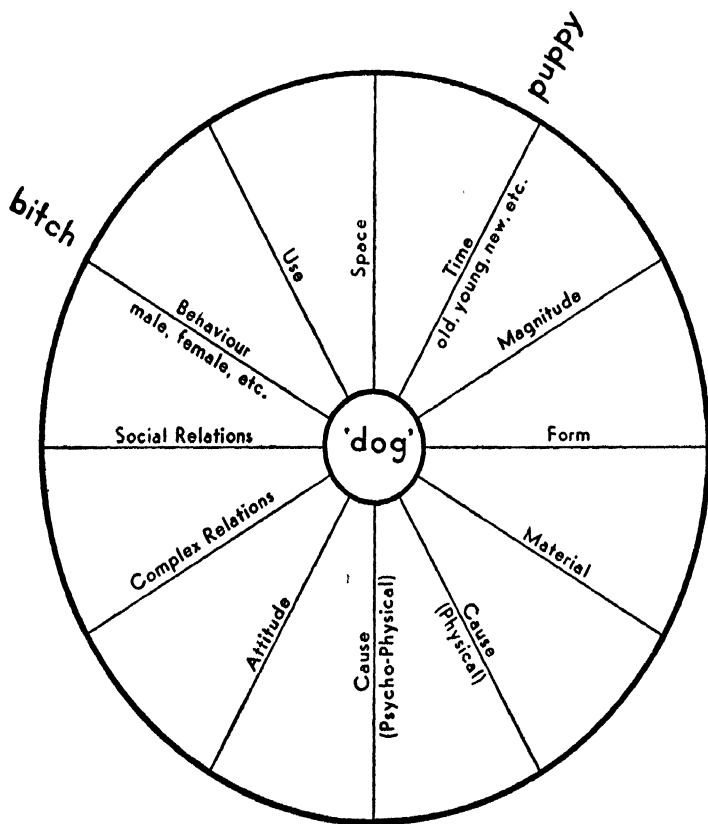


Figure 15. Panoptic Conjugation (Simplified Sketch)

line, will take the place of the new word at the end of the line, that word may go. And because such words as 'young' and 'writing' can be used in connection not only with 'dog' but with hundreds of other words, we shall, with their help, be able to eliminate hundreds of 'circumference' words similar to 'puppy' and 'desk.'

The elimination formula for Basic English is, therefore: Given the word at the centre, and the means of covering any particular relationship in not more than nine other words, then the word at the end of the line can be eliminated.

Actually, in the Panoptic Eliminator as used at the Orthological Institute, there are not twelve but thirty such relationships for thirty sorts of possible questions, as shown in the reproduction opposite (Figure 16). Obviously for a word like 'dog' some questions will have no answer. Dogs do not come into all the relationships talked about in connection with men, mountains, machines or music; so there is, for example, no special word (such as 'litigant', 'plaintiff', 'client') for a dog in relation to Law.

'Man' is the sort of word which is likely to have the maximum number of answers. There is no term for a man which indicates the material he is made of, though a certain state of that material elicits the term 'corpse'. We can, however, refer to a man as:

- an inmate (a man in a certain place)
- a Southerner (a man from a certain place)
- an octogenarian (a man of a certain age)
- a dwarf (a man of a certain size)
- a centaur (a man to a certain extent)
- a friend (a man regarded emotionally)

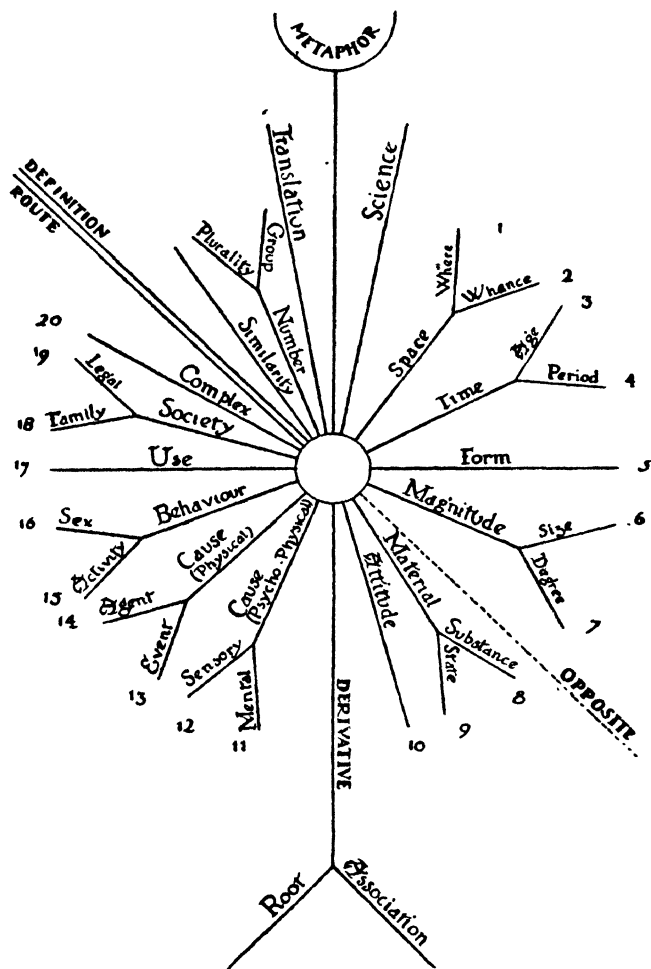


Figure 16. Panoptic Conjugation

- a beau (a man causing certain mental reactions)
- a negro (a man causing certain sensory reactions)
- a father (a man acting as physical agent)
- a soldier (a man for a certain use or purpose)
- a lover (a man behaving in a certain way)
- a male (sex)
- a brother (family relation)
- a tenant (legal relation)

In practice, however, not all words which might be eliminated are in fact eliminated. Four other considerations have been taken into account in deciding for or against any particular word. A word is kept, although it could have been eliminated,

1. If the substitute phrase would be very awkward to manipulate, or
2. If it is needed *very* often, or
3. If many other useful words can be derived from it (see page 83), or
4. If it can take the place of one of two words which, because they have the same sound but different meanings, would confuse the learner.

This brief description of Panoptic Conjugation gives but a poor idea of the vast knowledge, the brilliant research and the many years of patient effort on which the system is based. It is the practical application of an entirely new theory of definition which was first elaborated in a book called *The Meaning of Meaning*, written by C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards and first published in 1923. This book is now regarded by Universities all over the world as the foundation for a new science — Semantics, the study of meaning. It is a

book which those who realize the importance of this subject would find of absorbing interest. The practical teacher, however, is more concerned with results than with research, and for him the results of Panoptic Conjugation may be simply and briefly summarized in this way.

## The Basic Words

The number of words in AC is 850. With these 850 words we can express all the ideas normally covered by the 25,000 in AB as a whole. With these 850 words we can define and explain all the 24,150 words in CB.

What sorts of words are they? We may say, at the outset, that they are not necessarily the words used most *commonly* in speaking or writing. Most of them are in fact very common, but they have been chosen not for their frequency but for their *usefulness*. In short they are the most *useful* words. What do we mean exactly by 'useful'?

## Utility

They are most useful because, in the first place, *they are the most inclusive in meaning*. Suppose, for example, we were uncertain whether to have 'branch' or 'bough', in the list. Panoptic Conjugation shows that 'branch', besides having the meaning of 'bough' (of a tree), can be used metaphorically to cover many other ideas. We can talk for example about

- a branch of knowledge
- a branch of a family
- a branch line (railway)
- a branch of a bank

We could *not* talk about a 'bough of knowledge' etc. That is, 'branch' is a much wider term than 'bough'. It includes 'bough' and also many other ideas besides; it is the more inclusive in meaning. Hence no list of 850 words which includes 'bough' and excludes 'branch' could possibly be regarded as scientific.

Secondly the Basic words are *key-words*; they open doors to the largest possible number of meanings. Words like 'go' and 'in' are perhaps the most important key-words, because in combination they enable us to dispense with so many verbs, which in any language are the words which give most trouble to the learner. But combination is not limited to action words only. We have shown how 'writing-table' (a table for writing) can replace 'desk', and in the same way thousands of single words can be replaced by compounds consisting of two or more useful key-words which can be taken apart and reassembled to suit any number of purposes.

Thus, as we have seen (page 68), if we have 'child' (children), 'play' and 'room' in our list we do not need 'nursery'; we can say 'undershirt' for 'vest'; 'newspaper-man' for 'journalist'; 'collar-button' for 'stud'; and so on. Words like 'play', 'room', 'news', 'button', are key words. Each stands for a concept which it would be difficult to refer to in any other way. But words like 'nursery' are luxury words; they stand for concepts which can be simply and shortly covered by other 'key-words' used in combination. Clearly it is much easier for a pupil who has learnt the meaning of 'play' and 'room' to learn the meaning of 'playroom' (a room where children play) than it is to learn an entirely new word like 'nursery'.

Thirdly, the Basic words are the most useful because they are the most *elastic*, that is, they can be stretched to do the most work. Suppose, for example, that the two words 'merchant' and 'trader' (discussed on Page 69) are equally representative of the group to which they belong, that they have the same range of meaning. Which should we choose? Actually there is no word 'trader' in the Basic list; there is only 'trade'. But from 'trade', once learnt, we can very easily make 'trader', 'traded' and 'trading', all very useful words. Even if we had 'merchant' we should still need 'trade', 'traded' and 'trading', because we cannot say 'merchanted' and 'merchanting'. For this reason alone, therefore, we should be inclined to eliminate 'merchant' and keep 'trade'. In the Basic list there are no less than 300 words which take these endings '-er', '-ed', and '-ing', which partly explains why it is possible to do so much with such a short list.

This, then, is what I mean when I say that the Basic words are the most useful: they are the most inclusive words; they are key-words; they are elastic words.

## Simplicity

Now no one who knows anything of the development of the English language will be surprised when we go on to say that in English, fortunately for the learner, the most useful words happen to be also the simplest words. Out of the Basic 850 words no less than 600, the most frequently used, are speaking words *normally used by an English child of six*, that is, about the time he is beginning to learn how to read and write. What we are suggesting, in effect, is that with these

600 words we are able to say almost anything that may be said with a vocabulary thirty times as large. But what has this to do with the development of the English language?

Until roughly the year 1066 the language of England was Anglo-Saxon, the language of the Teutons who invaded the country at the time of the break-up of the Roman Empire. Now the Anglo-Saxons, we may suppose, led fairly full lives; they did most of the fundamental things we do to-day; they were born, grew up, worked and played, went about, got married, had children, grew old and died. And for all these things, clearly, they must have had the necessary words . . . . Then in 1066 came William the Conqueror and his Norman army, and for the next three hundred years the language of England was not Anglo-Saxon but French. Like English in India it was the language of government, of the courts, of culture and education; Anglo-Saxon was used only by the ignorant masses. It is only natural that during this period a great number of French words should have found their way into the native language. But they did not *oust* their Anglo-Saxon equivalents; they were merely *laid on top of them*, providing alternatives for existing expressions. For example:

<i>Anglo-Saxon</i>	<i>French</i>
go (come) in	enter
get ready	prepare
go in front of	precede
put in	insert
get off a ship	disembark
make tired	fatigue



Thus English is really not one language but two, with the words all mixed up together. It is this that makes the language at once so rich and so difficult for the foreigner to learn. But it is also this which, properly understood and exploited, *could* make it so *easy* to learn.

For although there are now more words of French and Latin and Greek origin in the language than there are Anglo-Saxon, it is the Anglo-Saxon element which is responsible for the ever-increasing tendency to simplification in the language. We shall see this more clearly when we come to discuss the grammar of Basic English. Meanwhile we need only note that in concentrating on the Anglo-Saxon elements of the language in the introductory stage we are following, in the main, the same line of development as that of the English child, and the same line of development as that of the English language as a whole. The Anglo-Saxon said 'go up' (not 'ascend'); the English child says 'take out' (not 'extract'); and even the English adult, in conversation at least, says 'put out' (not 'extinguish'). We shall return to this aspect of Basic later.

Not all the Basic words, of course, are Anglo-Saxon. The Anglo-Saxons led full lives, no doubt, but they did not do *all* the things we do to-day. They had no newspapers, and so could have no *advertisements*. They had no surgeons, and so could have no *operations*. They knew no science, and so had no scientific *apparatus*. Such words therefore we have had to take from the French or Latin, and they account for most of the words in the Basic list which the English child does *not* use at the age of six. They are included because it was desired to make Basic a *complete* medium

of expression; and without them it could not have been. This does not mean that the *very* young foreign learner has to learn them at once. He will learn them, as the English child does, when his mind is sufficiently developed to comprehend the ideas and concepts they symbolise.

Nor must it be thought that the makers of Basic English, in combing the dictionary for the essential words, gave preference to the Anglo-Saxon elements as such. If a word of French origin was considered to be more useful than its Anglo-Saxon equivalent it was included. The fact that so many of the words in the list *are* Anglo-Saxon only proves that in general the Anglo-Saxon words are the most useful.

It is not easy to say, briefly, why some languages, like Anglo-Saxon, should prefer compounds of two simple elements to single words expressing complex ideas; while others, like Latin, should prefer the single complex idea to the compound. But there is no doubt which sort of language is easier to learn and teach.

The simplest words to teach, in any language, are those that can be taught by simple pointing. For the teaching of words like 'table', 'chair', 'book', there need be no language common to teacher and taught. The teacher points to the object and gives the name and the pupil learns the name of the object. Almost as simple are the words that can be taught by acting.

*I take the book off the table.*

*I get out my books*

says the teacher, suiting the actions to the words, and if he repeats them often enough in different situations,

the pupil will soon learn the meaning of the words 'take', 'off', 'get', and 'out'.

To go on from this to an expression like 'take out a tooth' is not a big step. The learner may not have come across the 'take out' combination, but when he does so he is not likely to have difficulty in understanding it. But '*extract*' a tooth would be quite incomprehensible; it is just one more different word. The learner cannot know it unless we explain it, and to explain it we must either use the vernacular or fall back on 'take out'.

It is clear then that 'take out' is closer to the action which it symbolizes than 'extract'. And this is the next point we have to emphasize about the Basic words. Not only are they the most useful and the simplest; they are also *the most fundamental, the closest to reality, the most concrete for pointing purposes.*

### Close to Reality

All words, of course, are symbols. Many stand for things or actions or qualities which would still exist in reality but which would be nameless if we had no words to describe them. They are *once* removed from the reality they describe. But a word like 'extract', which stands for 'take out', is really a symbol of a symbol; it is *twice* removed from reality. It is a kind of shorthand which has to be learnt *in addition to* the name itself. Other such shorthand words are 'accelerate' for 'go more quickly', 'ascertain' for 'get knowledge of', and 'clarify' for 'make clear'. These shorthand words make up a large part of the language, and we shall of course have to teach them later on. But not till the child has thoroughly assimilated the simpler, more fundamental elements. It is quite easy to explain

'accelerate' in terms of 'go more quickly'; we could not possibly explain 'go more quickly' in terms of 'accelerate.'

Another simple but interesting fact revealed by Panoptic Conjugation was that most abstract nouns (like 'goodness', 'liberty', 'blindness') can very easily be dispensed with. 'To have liberty' is only another way of saying 'to be free', for 'goodness is not common among children' we may say 'most children are not good'; 'what is the cause of blindness?' may be rendered by 'why are some persons unable to see?' Having eliminated all such abstract nouns, fictions as they are called, most of the words we are left with are words which get nearer to fact, are closer to reality.

Finally there are a large number of words which not only describe a person or thing but at the same time describe the speaker's attitude to that person or thing. For example we all know the kind of child who hasn't a very high opinion of himself. Some may praise him for his 'modesty'; others scold him for his 'diffidence'. 'Modesty' and 'diffidence' are clearly words which pass a judgment on the child, the judgment being determined by the observer's own mental make-up. By eliminating such 'judgment-words' we not only get rid of a large number of unessentials; we also ensure that we shall, in our statements, restrict ourselves to actual facts (this child has not a very high opinion of himself) and so eliminate what is very often a source of misunderstanding and ill-will.

We thus find ourselves left, after the process of Panoptic Elimination, with 850 words all of which are useful, most of which are simple, and many of which are one stage nearer that solid base in pointing and

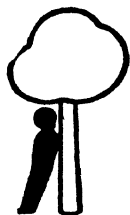
acting from which the structures of language go up into the clouds.

### Picturability

I have stressed this 'solid base in pointing and acting' because it is too little realized how greatly the technique of language-teaching *depends* on the kind of words we choose to teach *first*. I shall deal with this relationship between method and material more fully later, when I discuss the Basic approach to teaching methods (in Part II). Meanwhile I need only say that if the ideal of language-teaching in the early stages is to teach as much as possible by pointing or by acting or through pictures it is essential to have words which can be taught in this way.

In these days of education through the eye it is no longer necessary to prove that an object or a picture makes a more lasting impression on the memory than word-symbols, and that the use of pictures goes a long way towards making the learner independent of the teacher. All this is well known. The problem is rather how to *apply* this knowledge in the language lesson. The inventors of Basic, having produced a minimum vocabulary which contains, proportionately, a far greater number of picturable words than any other, have now encouraged research to discover how best these words might be pictured. In *Basic by Isotype* (a page of which is reproduced on page 90) illustrations are suggested for no less than 500 of the 850 Basic words, including words like 'a' and 'the' which are usually taught as 'grammar'.

But such considerations, as I say, belong rather to the discussion of method. Here we are concerned more



boy against a tree



boy with a stick



boy going through a door



boy going up the steps



boy going down the steps

Figure 17. Basic by Isotype

directly with the question of material. Panoptic Elimination has left us with a residue of 850 useful, simple and fundamental words. How may they be classified?

## The Structure of Basic

It is not my intention to give a complete account of the system here. That has been done, far more fully and adequately than I could hope to do it, in *Basic English* and *The ABC of Basic English*. In giving this skeleton account my aim is merely to emphasize those features which justify the claim of Basic to be not merely a word-list but an entirely new approach to language-learning and teaching. Many of these features belong to the field of grammar and idiom, which will be dealt with in the next chapter, but there are a few which may conveniently be considered from the point of view of vocabulary.

First it must be noted (see chart on page 2) that the inventors of Basic have discarded, for certain purposes, the old grammatical terminology — ‘nouns’, ‘adjectives’, etc. and have fallen back on a more fundamental classification. The language of a certain country may or may not have ‘verbs’ and ‘pronouns’, but in every country there are *things*; so the first and most natural question about a language is ‘What names has it for *things*?’

Of the 850 Basic words no less than 600 are names of things (nouns). Of all names they are the most important, because if we went about knowing them only we could make ourselves clear most of the time. In a restaurant, for example, if I say ‘apple’ to the waiter he will understand me as well as if I had said, ‘Please bring me an apple’.

Here again it must not be thought the inventors of Basic went out of their way to include a large proportion of nouns. It was the process of Panoptic Elimination that yielded them — science confirming what we already know from everyday experience.

The list of names of things covers a very wide range. Two hundred are names of common things which, except for four geometrical shapes (circle, angle etc.), can be touched, seen and isolated from other things. They are therefore classified as 'picturable'.

Some of the things referred to by the 400 general names, such as an animal, or a vessel, are of a similar character but are too generalized for pictorial presentation alone. In order to picture 'animal', for example, we should have to show pictures of a dog, a cat. etc., and say: 'These are animals'. But they are picturable in this sense. Other things, such as a mine, or a road, can be touched and seen but not, as a rule, detached from their surroundings. Others again, such as ink, oil, or tin, are liquids or materials which cannot be treated either as moveable or as fixed material objects, but are yet concrete, and can be isolated in definite amounts.

In addition to these names there are a number of nouns (for example, 'harmony', 'quality') which do not stand for anything concrete.

Next in importance, in *any* language, to the names of things, are the names of qualities ('adjectives' or 'qualifiers'). By putting a qualifier ('red', 'hard', 'smooth') before 'apple' I can make it clear what sort of apple I want. In Basic there are 150 of these describing words, of which 100 can be learnt as pairs of opposites (good-bad, straight-bent, sweet-bitter etc.)



This leaves us with 100 'miscellaneous' words, which put the others into operation and make them do their work in statements.

Most important of these are the 'operators' proper — 'come' and 'go', 'put' and 'take', 'make' and 'do', 'give' and 'get', 'let' and 'keep'. The grammatical term 'operator' is a new term born with Basic English and I think it deserves a word of explanation.

### The Operators

When the task of simplification began it was realised that a very large number of verbs consist of two elements

1. An *act* pure and simple.
2. The *direction* in which the act is performed.

Thus 'go' is the act element in the verb 'enter'; 'in' is the direction element. But if the term 'verb' is used for the whole complex idea of 'enter' then other terms must be found to describe the simple act element 'go' and the simple direction element 'in'. The terms invented were 'operator' (for 'go') and directive (for 'in'). Figure 18 (on page 95) shows this analysis more clearly.

There are three more 'operators': ('be', 'seem' and 'have') which are also used as auxiliaries to help in the formation of tenses (I *have* come, I *am* coming), of the passive voice (it *has been* kept), and of what might be called the 'mirror-voice' (he *seems* happy). Because of their double function these three words may be called 'operator-auxiliaries'. Two more auxiliaries pure and simple ('may' and 'will') and three verbs pure and simple ('say', 'see', and 'send')—included because they are so useful and provide a link between

the operators and the verb-system proper) make up the total to 18.

The combination of the ten operators and the three operator-auxiliaries<sup>1</sup> with the twenty directives immediately gives us equivalents of roughly 200 simple English verbs. Thus, 'put in' = 'insert'. But 'put in' is actually the equivalent of many other verbs in particular situations. Thus, for example,

- put* (a word) *in* = interject
- put* (an account) *in* = render
- put* (the tea) *in* = infuse
- put* (the sheep) *in* = fold
- put* (a request) *in* = file
- put* (a seed) *in* (the earth) = plant
- put* (things) *in* (a house) = install

Let us suppose there are twenty of these variations for each operator, and we get not 200 but 4,000 fresh 'words', chiefly self-evident, two-piece, analytic equivalents for what in ordinary English or any other language would involve an extra word, all without adding a single 'idiom' proper (see Chapter 4), or increasing in any way the phonetic difficulty of the foreigner. But there are of course more than 4,000 verbs in English. The others are covered

1. By the combination of the operators with other words in the Basic list,

- |                     |   |                  |
|---------------------|---|------------------|
| <i>e.g.</i> to push | — | to give a push   |
| to pull             | — | to give a pull   |
| to kick             | — | to give a kick   |
| to fatigue          | — | to make tired    |
| to butter           | — | to put butter on |

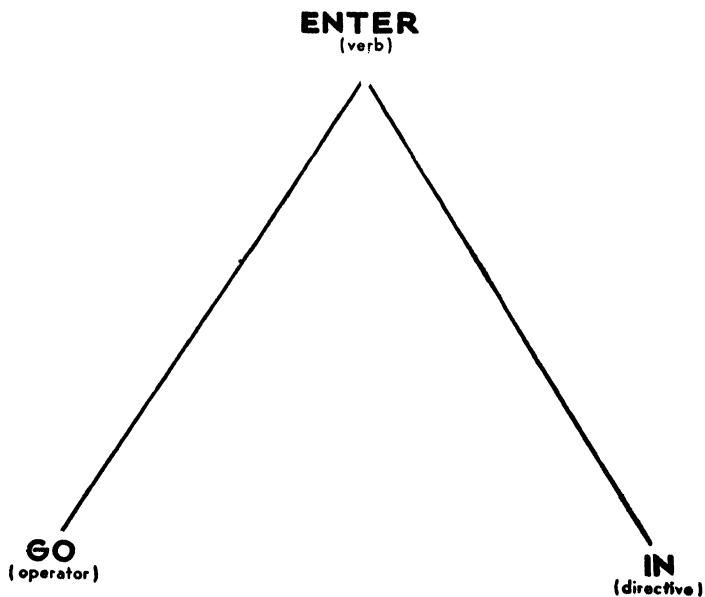


Figure 18. Verb - Analysis

2. By the adjectival use, where possible, of descriptive nouns in the general list ending in ' -ing '.

*e.g.* I am *writing*  
He has been *teaching*

3. By the use of the endings ' -ed ', and ' -ing. '

*e.g.* The book was *printed* here  
Be *seated*

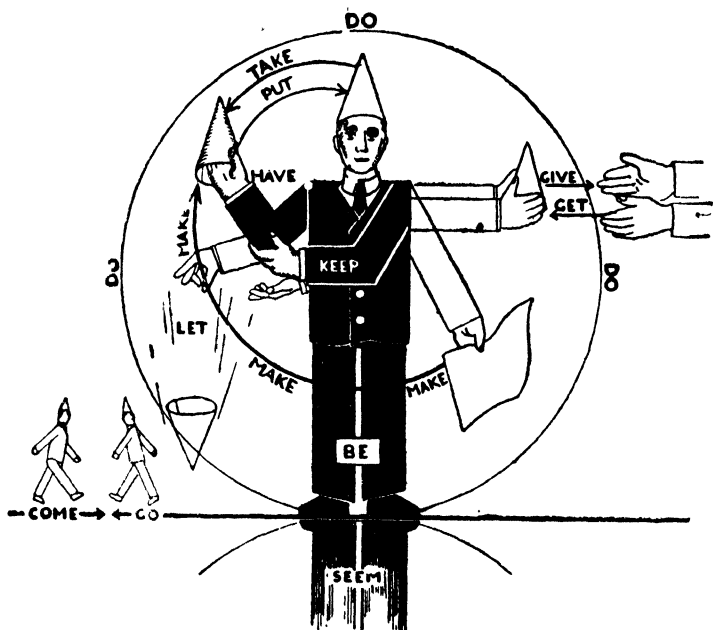
In the diagram of operators on page 97 and the diagram of directives on page 99 will be found pictured all the units which in combination provide equivalents for so many hundreds of English verbs.

It was this elimination of the verb that made Basic English, in its present form, possible. Actually it was the last of the various discoveries on which the system is based. In *The Meaning of Meaning* Mr. Ogden and Dr. Richards had shown that, because the relations used in definitions may be reduced to a very small number, a very restricted language was possible — a language which would put *descriptions* of things in place of *names* for them.

But at that time there were two objections to such a restricted language.

1. It seemed that even if it could be worked out in ten years, such a language would need much more intelligence in its users than could be expected, and
2. No one could see how it might be made to sound at all like ordinary 'complete' English.

The solution was Mr. Ogden's analysis of the verb. This was the step that changed the whole situa-



## OPERATIONAL CONSTRUCTIONS

MAKE the paper into a hat  
 HAVE the hat.  
 PUT the hat on the head  
 TAKE the hat from the head.  
 KEEP the hat here.  
 LET the hat go.

GIVE the hat to someone.  
 GET the hat from someone  
 GO from this place  
 COME to this place  
 BE doing  
 SEEM to be (doing)

DO any act.

Figure 19. The Operators at Work

tion and enabled Mr. Ogden to select the 850 words. Before then no one had succeeded in finding even a 3000 word-list with an equal range of powers.

How the discovery was made is also an interesting and instructive bit of linguistic history. About the time *The Meaning of Meaning* was published Mr. Ogden was engaged in translating a number of 'Americanisms' into English for the International Library of Psychology. 'Get busy', for example, is not yet 'correct' English; we have to say 'begin' or 'commence': 'put wise' is still slang; in polite society we say 'inform'.

Naturally the question arose in his mind: Who or what is responsible for these new formations?

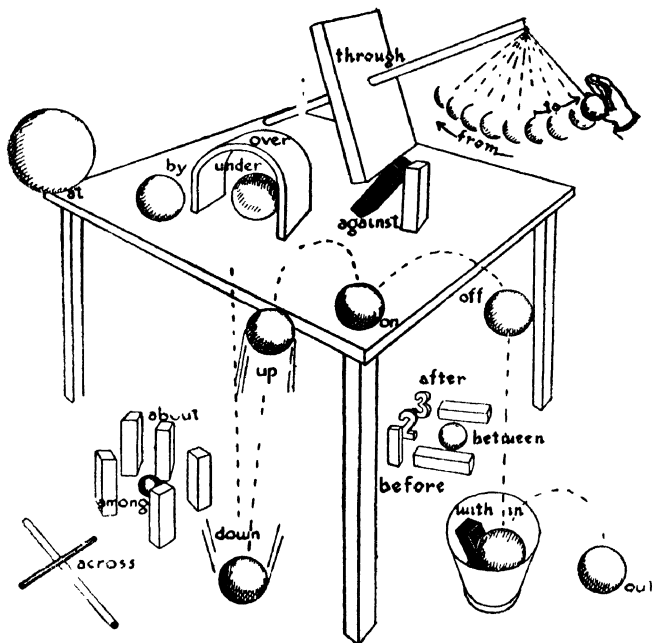
And back came the answer — Analogy.

If we can say, for example,  
'get in', 'get out', 'get over', 'get under', 'get ready'  
— then why not 'get *busy*'?

If we can say, likewise,  
'put in', 'put out', 'put over', 'put under', 'put  
across' — then why not 'put *wise*'?

Clearly from the point of view of a restricted language the translation of expressions like 'put wise', the elements of which can be separated and recombined in all sorts of ways, into the one word 'inform', which has no other use, was a step in the *wrong* direction. Panoptic Elimination did the rest.

Having thus accounted for 38 of the miscellaneous words (10 operators, 3 operator-auxiliaries, 2 auxiliaries, 3 verbs, 20 directives) we are left with 62 comprising pronouns (I, you etc.), articles ('a' and 'the'), qualifiers (much, little, etc.), conjunctions (and, but, etc.) and a few other words (where, why, etc.)



**AT** The ball is *at* the edge of the table.  
**FROM** The ball is going *from* the hand.  
**TO** The ball is going *to* the hand.  
**AFTER** 3 is *after* 2.  
**BEFORE** 1 is *before* 2.  
**THROUGH** The rod is *through* the board.  
**BETWEEN** The ball is *between* the bricks.  
**UNDER** The ball is *under* the arch.  
**OVER** The arch is *over* the ball.  
**BY** The ball is *by* the arch.

**WITH** The black brick is *with* the ball.  
**AGAINST** The black brick is *against* the white brick.  
**ACROSS** The black rod is *across* the white rod.  
**AMONG** The ball is *among* the bricks.  
**ABOUT** The bricks are *about* the ball.  
**DOWN** The ball is *down*.  
**UP** The ball is *up*.  
**ON** The ball is *on* the table.  
**OFF** The ball is *off* the table.  
**IN** The ball is *in* the bucket.

**OUT** The ball is *out* of the bucket.

Figure 20. The Directives

which are not really essential (in what place, for what reason) but are useful in oiling the wheels of the machine so that Basic need not 'creak' in the ears of those who are used to normal English.

## Elasticity

This, then, is the Basic vocabulary. We have already mentioned one way in which the vocabulary may be 'stretched', without creating difficulties, to do its work — the use of the endings '-er', '-ing', '-ed'. Now it remains to list four other ways (already touched upon in the description of Panoptic Elimination) in which the scope of a noun, or of any other word in the vocabulary, may be expanded.

### 1. Shifts

The first is simple — the use of one word as more than one part of speech, a trick to which English, again, lends itself more easily than any other language. The most important of these shifts are:

- (a) Action nouns ending in '-ing' may be used as qualifiers —  
*e.g.* a *moving* train.
- (b) Certain adjectives may be used as nouns —  
*e.g.*, a *cut* in the cloth, his *equal* in running
- (c) 'Back' (noun) may be used as an adverb —  
*e.g.*, ten days back
- (d) 'Light' (noun) may be used as an adjective to cover 'pale' — *e.g.* light green.
- (e) 'Round' (adjective) may be used as a directive — *e.g.* go round the garden.



## 2. Compounds

Compounds may be formed by combining together two nouns, or a noun and a directive, etc., in conformity with simple standard English; *e.g.* birthday, newspaper, overland, etc.

## 3. Extension

The rule with regard to extension of meaning is that from any Basic word as many recognized extensions may be formed as are simple, easily understood and convenient. Thus a letter (of the alphabet) may be extended to include a letter (epistle), a bite (action) to a bite (in an apple), a lift (action) to a lift (elevator) and so on.

## 4. Specialization

The rule with regard to specialisation of meaning is that any Basic word may be used in *one* additional specialized sense. Thus 'account' may be used in the sense of 'bill'; 'judge' (of anything) may be limited to a legal judge, and so on.

Attempts are now being made to picture not merely the root-senses of the Basic words but also their metaphorical expansions. No learner, for example, who has studied the 'branches' pictured on page 102 could fail to understand, when he comes across them in his reading, sentences like

We came to a stop at a branch in the road.

He was sent to one of the company's branches.

*The Basic Words*, a page of which is reproduced opposite the pictures, is being designed as a key to the senses and uses of the 850 words.

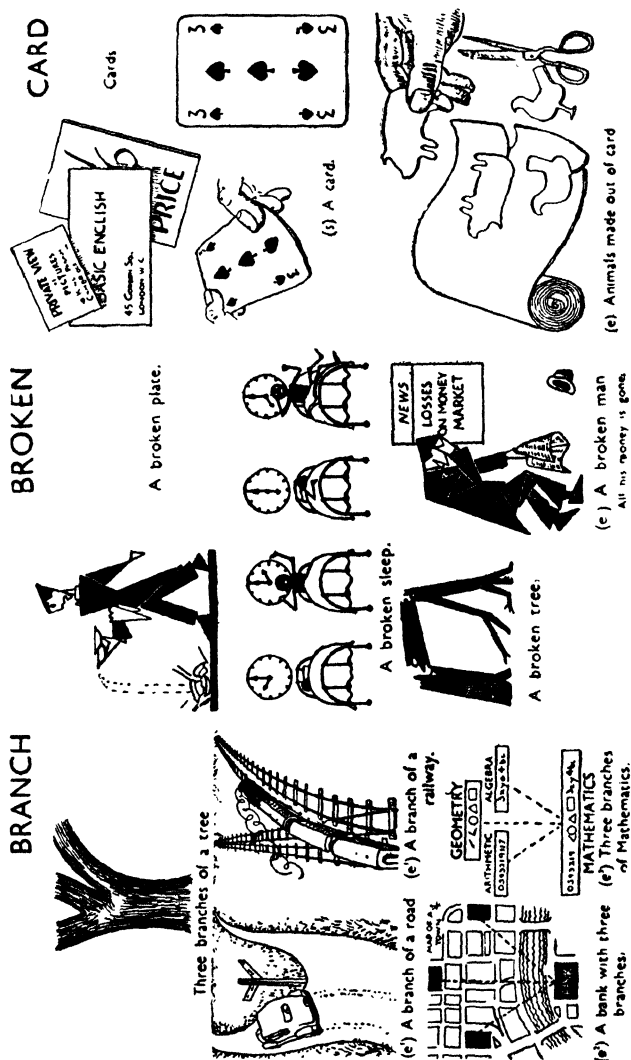


Figure 21. Picturable Expansions

## THE BASIC WORDS

### ONE BY ONE, WITH PICTURES

#### BRANCH

**SENSE.** The root sense is given as a shoot or limb of any tree or shrub.

The only expansion is to the various forms of offshoot or subdivision which may be regarded as forking from a major trunk or parent source—such as the branches of a road or railway, or (with less or no contactual relationship) of a commercial organization, a genus, or a science.

**IDIOM.** There are no idioms.

**DERIVATIVES.** *-er, -ing, -ed.*

**TEACHING.** The word is taught from a picture of the branches of a tree, and the expansion is illustrated by the analogous branches of a road, a railway, a bank, and a science.

#### BROKEN

**SENSE.** Smashed in pieces, fractured; not whole or continuous.

This includes, by fictional analogy, the application to sleep which is broken by various alarms and disturbances. The sense is expanded to a man shattered by financial loss, etc.

**IDIOM.** The only learner's idiom is *broken up*, as in 'The bread is broken up.'

**DERIVATIVE.** *un-*.

**TRANSLATION.** *Broken into* gives a useful equivalent for 'burgled'. The prefix *un-* gives a useful equivalent for whole, intact, etc.

**TEACHING.** The word is taught from a picture of a broken plate which has fallen on the floor, contrasted with plates still in the waiter's hand; pictures of a sleeper whose repose is disturbed at the appropriate hours; and, for the expansion, a man crumpled up by news of his losses like a tree shattered by a storm.

#### CARD

**SENSE.** The root sense is that of a visiting-card, showcard, or admission-card.

(s) playing card

(e) the stiff material of which cards are made.

**IDIOM.** There are no idioms.

**COMPOUNDS.** The only compound is *cardboard*.

**DERIVATIVES.** *-er, -ing, -ed.*

**TEACHING.** The word is taught from a picture of typical cards of admission, etc. In specialization is illustrated by a playing card, and the expansion by animal shapes cut from card as a material.

## The Basic English Dictionary

We have now classified the 850 words and summarized their uses. In Chapter I we saw how the defects of the word-counting principle were reflected in the *New Method Dictionary*. With a minimum vocabulary 'defining-list' of 1,400 words (taught in Readers IA — V) Dr. West found himself still short of "91 words and 63 usages", plus 357 double-definition words, which, though not yet taught, he was obliged to use in defining 18,000 common words. We showed further how the addition of these unlearnt items robs the dictionary of much of its value. And now the question arises: Is it possible to do with the 850 words of our AC line what Dr. West attempted to do with nearly 2000, that is, find definitions for the 24,150 words of our CB line?

Anyone who has understood the principle of Panoptic Elimination will immediately realize that the Basic English dictionary was, theoretically, complete by the time the last of the 850 words was chosen. Because the formula of Panoptic Elimination is:

Given the word at the centre, and the means of covering any particular relationship in not more than nine other words, then the word at the end of the line can be eliminated.

And this is only another way of saying:

No word may be eliminated *unless* it can be covered by the word at the centre plus not more than nine other words on the relationship line.

As we have seen, it was while they were *comparing definitions* that the authors of *The Meaning of Meaning* first realized how small was the number of

ideas necessary for definition. The Basic Dictionary was not, like the *New Method Dictionary*, an after-thought, an addendum, an extraneous growth. It was an integral, inevitable and automatic by-product of Panoptic Elimination; it was, so to speak, Panoptic Elimination in reverse.

The making of a dictionary is no light matter. If any of my readers would like to know how *not* to make one they should read Adelyne More's criticism of the *New Method Dictionary* in *Psyche*, Volume XV, 1935, in which a large number of the "1000 or so grosser errors" are discussed—in a most interesting way. In the *New Method Dictionary*, for example, we are told that an acid is 'a powerful liquid', and that an alkali is 'the opposite of an acid'. Now the opposite of a 'powerful liquid' is a 'weak liquid'. What then becomes of such powerful alkalis as potash lye and soda lye? But, again, not all acids are liquids. Phosphoric, barbituric, benzoic, and dozens of others are solids. Under *alkali*, moreover, we are told that 'an alkali mixed with an acid forms a salt'—but *salt* is defined only as table salt, or possibly sugar, since it is "the white powder commonly eaten with food." And so it goes on, page after page of the most astonishing errors, the most puzzling omissions, the most patent forms of circular definition (*e.g.*, circle = a round figure; round = circular) it is possible to meet, and a definition list stretched almost beyond recognition.

The *General Basic English Dictionary* (a *Dictionary of Scientific Terms* is also in the making) is as yet in the proof stage. But the years of brilliant linguistic research on which it is based (not confined only to Panoptic Conjugation), the credentials of its sponsors,

and the unfailing success of every literary or scientific work which has emanated from the same source — all these are a guarantee that it will be hailed as landmark in the history of lexicography and language-teaching. In fact I make bold to say that generations of foreign learners yet unborn, and even of Englishmen, will live to bless the day that Mr. Ogden sat down to translate 'Americanisms' into English for the International Library of Psychology!

### Special Lists

In addition to the 850 words I have described, the Basic system also includes 50 English words (*e.g.* 'hotel', 'telephone', 'bank') which are so well-known and so frequently used in various parts of the world that most *adults* who might want to use them will know them already.

For the purposes of Science, Basic is a system by which special word-lists, most of them international, may be put into operation. There are about 20 words in the 850 at a level high enough to make the connection; and in addition there are 100 words for general science and 50 for any special branch. These lists are only needed by the expert who is writing or talking about some one part of science, and are not for the general reader; but in the same way as Basic puts such groups of words into operation it takes the number system, the weights and measures, and the days of the weeks and months, which are different in different countries, as an addition for everyday purposes. The numbers themselves are international for writing, and the learning of their English names takes less than half an hour.

I shall return to these additional lists in a later chapter. Here I desire only to point out that neither the 'international words' nor the scientific terms are needed by the learner who is using Basic as a first step to English, and they are not included in the four Basic learning-books. They are mentioned here partly in order to round out the picture, partly in order to emphasize the purpose of Basic as an introduction to English, which is to lay a sound foundation of the word — and sentence — patterns into which all further details can later be fitted, and to provide a key which will unlock the door to the mysteries of English grammar and idiom.

For it is in these aspects of language-teaching — grammar and idiom — that the contribution of Basic English has perhaps been most notable.

The Panoptic Elimination of words has indeed already left us with the shortest, simplest and yet 'widest' minimum vocabulary it is possible to have — so short that it can be printed on one side of one small sheet of paper, so simple that it can be almost wholly understood by an English child of seven, so 'wide' that there is no subject it cannot cope with. And as for stability, the fourth of our criteria, the objective methods by which it was worked out ensure that not for many years to come, not indeed until the English language itself has undergone profound changes, will there be need for any change, except possibly for a few words which become international. Just as there can be only one scientific method of chemical analysis, namely, the separation of elements, so can there be only one scientific method of word-elimination, namely, testing by definition. Anybody who starts out on the road to simplification will find himself compelled, sooner or later, to

follow the same route, and in the end he will arrive at the same destination. There is no other way.

But, as I have indicated, it is not merely the elimination of words as such that will give Basic its place in history; it is rather the simplification of *grammar* and *idiom* that sets Basic apart once and for all from the mere word-lists with which it is so often confused, which makes it a complete little language system in itself, and to these things we must now turn.



## CHAPTER 4

### SELECTION — GRAMMAR AND IDIOM

So far, for the sake of simplicity, we have been looking at English mainly as a collection of unrelated words. We have narrowed down the teaching problem to a word problem, and we have seen that only by a process of elimination can the fundamental idea of word-selection be carried to its logical conclusion.

But no language is merely a collection of unrelated words. A pupil may learn 800 English words, or 8,000 words or 80,000 words, and still not be able to express a single coherent thought in English. Words have to be put together, and in order to put words together he must know other things besides — the order of combination, the changes entailed by combination, and so on.

The word 'spring', for example, looks harmless enough, but in combination with other words it may become 'sprang' or 'sprung'; the pupil, having learnt it in the sense of 'jump', may well be perplexed when he reads that Tommy 'sprang a surprise' on his father. By eliminating all but 15 operators and three verbs the inventors of Basic not only solved the problem of restriction; they also took a big step towards *grammatical* simplification.

### Verb-Elimination

The verb-form, as every teacher knows, has always been the greatest difficulty in the teaching of English. It is hardly too much to say that more than half the mistakes made by foreign learners are 'verb-mistakes' — in conjugation ('shined' for 'shone', 'laid' for 'lain')

etc.), in tenses ('he did not come yet') and in meaning ('born' for 'borne'). Unfortunately most of the difficult irregular verbs are all very *common* words, and therefore every frequency word-list, from 1000 to 5000, includes them all. Hardly, that is, has the learner pushed off from the shore when he finds himself struggling in a sea of irregular verbs — write, wrote, written; sink, sank, sunk — which will take him years to master.

But, it may be said, if the learner goes on to normal English these verbs will have to be learnt *sometime*. Why not at the beginning? And furthermore even in the Basic list there are 18 'verbs'. Their conjugations have to be learnt, and with them the whole tense system — present perfects, pluperfects and so on. What difference does it make?

The difference is — one thing at a time. The four forms of each of the four tenses (including the future-past tense) *must* be difficult for a learner whose own language has only three tenses, each limited to one form. 'He would have gone' is, admittedly, entirely new ground, and even in Basic it has to be taught. But the teaching must be far easier if the learner is relieved of the necessity of having to learn 102 of the 120 irregular verb conjugations at the same time as he is learning the tricks of the Basic 18. Once he has learnt these tricks the way is clear to the unhampered learning of the irregular past and past participles.

What we are aiming at is complete accuracy by the end of the one-level practice stage. By eliminating all but 18 'verbs' Basic has at last made it possible to concentrate on achieving complete accuracy, through

concentration on the fundamental points, *before* letting loose on the pupil all the terrors of the irregular verb-system. By using the operators and by exploiting the ‘-ing’, ‘-ed’ endings to the fullest possible extent, nouns and adjectives can be made to do double work, and once the fundamental points of word-operation *have* been grasped the verb-system will be found to have lost more than half its terrors.

It is this same idea of *one thing at a time* that underlies those other forms of grammatical simplification in the Basic system which do not, like the elimination of verbs, arise directly from Panoptic Conjugation.

### ‘Will’ and ‘Shall’

Let us look again, for a moment, at the typical English combination we used as an illustration in Chapter 1:

I shall come here again tomorrow.

The learner has to know, for example,

- (1) that under certain circumstances an adverb of place (‘here’) precedes an adverb of time (‘tomorrow’) and
- (2) that the future of ‘come’ is formed with ‘shall’ (1st person) and with ‘will’ (2nd and 3rd persons).

In Chapter 1 we assumed, to simplify the argument, that it was necessary for the child to learn that in changing direct speech to indirect speech, after a reporting verb in the past tense, ‘shall’ becomes ‘would’. But is even this, in the introductory stage, *really* necessary? The pupil must, of course, learn that

the past tense of 'will' is 'would'. But is it necessary for him to know that 'would' is also the past tense of 'shall'? If he learns 'I shall', 'you will', etc., then of course it will be necessary, if, however, we eliminated 'shall' it would not be necessary.

But can we eliminate 'shall'—without doing violence to the English language? The average Englishman, more often than not, says neither 'I shall' nor 'I will'; he says 'I'll'. Ask him whether the 'I'll' stands for 'I will' or 'I shall' and the chances are he will not be able to tell you.

Grammarians, it is true, do make a distinction between 'I shall come' and 'I will come'. 'I shall come', they say, expresses simple futurity; 'I will come' expresses a determination that will brook no opposition—I *will* come here again tomorrow (and no one *shall* stop me). It is this distinction which causes the worst complications in the change to indirect speech. For if we convert 'I *will* come' into 'He said he would go' the idea of determination is lost. Ought we then to make it 'He said he *should* go'? That again is wrong. And so on.

This is the sort of knot in which the learner gets so badly tied up when he starts learning English. If all Englishmen were grammarians then, possibly, there would be no help for it. If the distinction were vital to a knowledge of the language at any stage the pupil would be bound to learn it. But most Englishmen are far from being grammarians, so far in fact that, as I have said, not one in a thousand knows or cares about the difference. The average Englishman uses both 'will' and 'shall' quite indiscriminately, sometimes one, sometimes the other, to express simple futurity. If he

wants to express determination he usually does it in some other way ('I've made up my mind to etc.'). Why then should we burden the pupil, at the outset, with a learning-item which the Englishman himself does not bother about? Certainly, before the pupil completes his ten-year school course he will have to learn the distinction. But there will be plenty of time for that. First of all let him get hold of the *really* fundamental points.

'I shall come tomorrow here', is *not* English, because the words are in the wrong order. 'I will come here tomorrow' *is* English, whether the idea is one of determination or of simple futurity. Correct word-order must be taught from the outset; distinctions such as that between 'will' and 'shall' need not be taught from the outset. That is the difference between a 'fundamental' and a 'not fundamental' grammatical point.

This is only one of the many ways in which the inventors of Basic have, for the first time in the history of language-teaching, carried over the idea of selection to grammar, always with the idea of simplifying the first step to English, always without doing violence to what is called the genius of the language. Indeed it may well be argued that this method of grammatical simplification is more in harmony with the genius of the language than the emphasis on irregularities which, in season and out of season, now take up so much time in the classroom. Because, at least in its grammar, the genius of English is its unceasing tendency towards greater simplicity, regularity, uniformity. The history of the English language has in fact been one long story of simplification.

"It is only," says Jespersen, "when we compare the entire linguistic structure of some remote period with the structure in modern times that we observe that the gain in clearness and simplicity has really been enormous."

If it were not for the printing-press and the schools the 's' of the third person singular would long ago have followed the '-est' of the 2nd person 'bringest' and the 'en' of the 1st person plural 'bringen'. So too, if it were not for the schools, the present confusion over the subjunctive mood ('were' and 'should') would already be a thing of the past. Fowler (in *The King's English*) refers to the "dying" subjunctive, and Jespersen (in his *Essentials of English Grammar*) doubts whether even the idiom 'If I were you' will be "strong enough to prevail against the natural evolution of the language" much longer.

### Other Examples

As teachers of English we cannot at any stage (much as we might wish to) drop the 's' in 'he loves' — before the Englishman has dropped it. We cannot even neglect utterly and entirely language-forms like 'shall' and 'were' which the Englishman is gradually shedding; but these we can at least reserve for the post-introductory stage, when the pupil has had such a thorough grounding in the really fundamental points that not even the finest of grammatical distinctions can shake his command of the language.

Yet another example of Basic grammatical simplification is the elimination of the generic 'the' in sentences like 'The horse is a great help to man'. As

teachers, again, we know the great difficulty of teaching the difference between 'the' (a certain one) and 'a' (any one) to learners whose own language has neither. We labour to establish the principle of definite and indefinite and then, in the first book we open, we find 'the' used in quite a different way (for *all* of a class, not for *one*), thus confusing the issue entirely. Why should this be necessary when we can so easily say 'Horses are a great help to man'?

There are, of course, other uses of the generic 'the' which cannot be avoided (*e.g.* 'the body'), but these are not so great a source of confusion.

Finally, as a last example, we might mention the Basic restriction with regard to word order. No language has a more natural or logical fundamental sentence-pattern than English. But there are difficulties such as, for example, the place of adverbs of time and manner.

I gave him the money *yesterday*.

I have *now* given him the money.

*Never* have I given him any money.

Here again it is a question of which are the more fundamental points, and it is a question which no teacher would hesitate in answering. We cannot do without adverbs; but there is no need to stress the negative emphatic inversion exemplified in the third sentence. Wherever possible it can be avoided.

Hence in no Basic book, whether it is for learning or for reading, whether it is for children or for adults, whether it is a simple story or a treatise on logic, will there be found a single verb (*used* as a verb) outside the Basic 18, or a single 'shall', or a single 'were'

(subjunctive), or a single generic 'the' (used in the sense illustrated above), or an unnecessarily complex inversion. Whereas the word-counters merely list (see *Interim Vocabulary Report*)

will	15
shall	114

and are content to leave it at that, the inventors of Basic have exploited the tendencies to grammatical simplification already long manifest in the English language in the interests of the foreign learner.

### Idiom

There is, however, one respect in which English has become and is growing not simpler and easier but more complex and more difficult. Side by side with grammatical simplification there has gone on a process of *idiomatic* expansion which threatens to defy the most brilliant and persistent of foreign learners. He learns, for example, 'put' and 'up' and 'with' and has no difficulty in understanding when he is asked to *put* the picture *up* on the wall *with* a hammer. But when he is advised not to *put up with* insolence from the servants — what is he to make of it? All languages have idioms of this kind, in which words are combined to express an idea sometimes quite remote from their individual meanings. But English is particularly fertile in the creation of such expressions, and almost any page of any book will be found to be studded with them.

Clearly, then, it would be useless to select a minimum vocabulary if the writers of the books based on that vocabulary were given absolute freedom to employ



as many idiomatic combinations as they choose. That would defeat the whole object of word-selection — easy learning, easy reading. We cannot, without a great loss of force and naturalness, exclude *all* idioms. But we *can* restrict the number to the absolute minimum, and this is what the inventors of Basic have done.

In the same way as they have chosen and listed the most useful words they have chosen and listed the most useful idioms. Once the 250 selected idioms have been learnt (see page 301) idiom as such presents no further difficulty in the Basic one-level practice stage, because in no Basic book will there be found a single idiom which has not been taught.

Thus whatever value books hitherto based on frequency word-lists *might* have possessed as a simplified approach to the learning of English their usefulness has been largely negated by the unrestricted use of idioms. As Champion, criticizing the *New Method Readers*, says:

....vocabulary is treated in respect of word frequency as consisting only of isolated, disconnected words. But English is a language not of single words; it is essentially an idiomatic language in which many single words are used with a multiplicity of meaning....The proper grading of vocabulary involves not only the grading of words, but also and more important the grading of phrases and idioms.

The Basic idioms were not selected by counting; they were selected, like the Basic words, for their usefulness, their covering power. Thus 'take into account', one of the 250 idioms, can cover and therefore be substituted for any of the following:

consider	deal with	realize
allow for	reckon with	pay attention

But it may be argued that if the Basic writer is given free scope for metaphorical expansion he is not limited idiomatically. The difference between metaphorical expansion and idiom is this: Expansion is permitted only where the new meaning is likely to be *self-evident* once the root use has been mastered. Any use not fairly 'self-evident' is listed as an idiom. Thus 'into' in a sentence like 'thoughts come into the mind' is a fictional analogy derived from 'into' used in its root sense as a directional relation (*e.g.* I go *into* the garden). But providing all the words in the sentence are known no foreigner would have any difficulty in understanding the sentence as a whole. On the other hand the word 'across' in 'I came across a newspaper under the seat' *might* be puzzling, so this use is listed as one of the five idioms under the operator 'come'.

## Degrees of Simplification

Now that we have briefly illustrated the Basic simplification of grammar and idiom we are at last in a position to make a final comparison between Basic and the word-frequency systems. On pp. 120 and 121 is a summary of the differences viewed in the light of the four criteria we set up (in Chapter 2) for the objective judging of any word-list. How do these differences work out in practice? On page 29, to illustrate the general idea of simplification, we compared the original and Basic versions of a school story — *The Merchant of Venice*. Now let us make a three-fold comparison, inserting

another simplification based on a word-frequency system (see pp. 124 and 123).

Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare*, of which *The Merchant of Venice* is perhaps the most popular, are, as I have said, read by the English child about the age of eleven. In India the vocabulary is considered much too difficult for any form below the 10th, and if the story is prescribed at all it is usually for the High School Final examination (taken after ten years of English). Hence the need for simplification.

Column B shows a typical simplification based on the word-counting system. We see that it employs a vocabulary of only 2,000 words. But in no school have I seen it tackled before the sixth year of English. If language were merely a matter of vocabulary the preliminary preparation should not, calculating progress at the rate of 500 words a year, take more than four years. Why then does it take six years? Because grammar and idiom are far more difficult to acquire than individual word-units, and the grammatical and idiomatic content of A and B versions is practically the same. We find that in the first paragraph, out of seven words used by Lamb, only three changes are made in B. The verb system is retained in full (*e.g.*, live, lived, lived; lend, lent, lent); there are two 'money' words ('money' and 'fortune') and two 'trading' words ('lend' and 'merchant'); and the formal word 'manner' is used for the simpler 'way'.

C shows how much more drastic the Basic simplification is. Of the seven words used by Lamb not one remains. The three operators 'have', 'become', 'let', must be included in any vocabulary which includes 'live' and 'lend'. 'Well-off' can obviously be more

## SUMMARY OF

## Selection by Counting

Thousand-Word English	1000 words
New Method Readers	1400 „
Oxford English Course	2500 „
Tipping's Rapid Readers	5000 „

1. **Not Short** — because
  - (a) They contain synonyms
  - (b) Words are regarded as single units
2. **Not Simple** — because
  - (a) The words chosen are mainly 'reading-words'
  - (b) Idioms are not scientifically restricted
  - (c) Grammar is not simplified
3. **Not Wide** — because
  - (a) Many essential words are squeezed out by synonyms
  - (b) The words are chosen on the 'popularity' (not 'covering-power') principle
  - (c) The aim is chiefly 'childish' subject-matter
4. **Not Stable** — because
  - (a) The selection of material used as a basis of the word-count is arbitrary
  - (b) Word-counting indicates only which words are *more* necessary and less necessary, not which are *essential* and *unessential* for defining purposes

## DIFFERENCES

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Se'lection by Elimination

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Basic English

850 words

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1. **Short** — because
  - (a) There are no synonyms
  - (b) Advantage is taken of the analytical tendency in English
2. **Simple** — because
  - (a) The words are mainly concrete 'speaking words'
  - (b) Idioms are restricted to 250
  - (c) The grammar is simplified
3. **Wide** — because
  - (a) The words are chosen for their inclusiveness of meaning and elasticity
  - (b) Key-words can be combined and re-combined
  - (c) The aim is complete self-sufficiency for *all* subjects
4. **Stable** — because
  - (a) The selection is based on fundamental scientific principles
  - (b) The selection was made by the co-operative efforts of a number of research scholars over a long period of time

## COMPARATIVE SIMPLIFICATION

	A		B		C	
	Merchant of Venice		Merchant of Venice		Trader of Venice	
Title	Original, by Lamb		Oxford English Course		Basic English	
Version	10,000 different words		2,000 different words		850 different words	
Vocabulary	Shylock the Jew lived at Venice. He was an usurer, who had amassed an immense fortune by lending money at great interest to Christian merchants.		Shylock the Jew lived in Venice. He was a money-lender of the worst kind. He would wait until a merchant was in trouble and needed money badly; then he would lend the money at a high rate of interest. In this manner he had made a great fortune well-off for himself.		Shylock the Jew had a house in Venice. He was a money-trader. He let Christian traders have the use of his money at a high rate of interest, and in this way he had become very	
Text						

	A	B	C
Words	live usurer amass immense fortune lend merchant	live money-lender made great fortune lend merchant	had a house money-trader become well off let... have use of trader
Changes	—	3	7
Preparation	10 years	6 years	1 year

easily learnt, by the child who has learnt 'well' and 'off', than 'fortune'. The result is that the time needed for preparation is not, as might be supposed from a superficial comparison of the word-lists (2000 and 850), just under half of that needed for B. Practice has confirmed what theory would indicate — that the foreign learner has no difficulty with the *Basic Trader of Venice* if he takes it up after only one year with the Basic learning books. But the story in all three versions is the same, the ideas are the same, and whatever moral or cultural value the story may have as a story is the same.

Two sorts of objection are sometimes raised to the more drastic Basic simplification. The first is that the substitution of 'trader' for 'merchant' in such a classical title as *The Merchant of Venice* is little short of desecration, enough to make Shakespeare 'turn in his grave'. The answer to that, I think, is that Shakespeare must have turned so often in his grave at the linguistic horrors perpetrated in his name by generations of foreign learners that another little turn could not upset him so very much, especially if he realized that the substitution is symbolical of a reform in teaching-method which, if properly carried out, might allow his soul to rest in peace for all eternity!

The learner who uses Basic as a first step will discover soon enough that the historical title of the play and of the story is *The Merchant of Venice*. Then he can kick away, if he chooses, the scaffolding from beneath him. But if he learns by a method which puts 'merchant' before or side by side with 'trader' he will never have any basis on which to erect a scaffolding.



never have any scaffolding to kick away. He will simply mount an unending staircase every step of which is more shaky than the one before.

As for the learner who has only a one- or two-year course — which is better, that he should read *The Trader of Venice* in Basic or that he should read nothing at all? For those are the alternatives. Under such restricted conditions our aim must be first and foremost to teach English, not Shakespeare. If we made use of Shakespeare's story it would be chiefly because it is a good 'yarn'. But is its cultural value any the less because Antonio is called a 'trader' instead of a 'merchant'? Who can know, indeed, how near Shakespeare came to calling him a trader? If he had done so the purists of today would no doubt shudder to hear him called a 'merchant'.

And the second sort of objection is that the substitution of words or phrases may make the meaning less clear. We say, for example, 'Shylock *had a house* in Venice'. 'Ah', exclaim the legally-minded, '*to have a house* is not the same as *to live*. He may have had a house in Venice and yet lived in Rome.' No doubt he may have, but the context makes it quite clear that he did not. One of the great linguistic principles established in *The Meaning of Meaning* is that words, as isolated units, are meaningless. They acquire meaning only in a context, and the context is not simply other words, but things, realities, situations, life itself. We shall return to this subject again in Chapter 6. But all will agree, I think, that anyone who reads the first paragraph of the Basic version will be in no doubt as to

whether Shylock resided in Venice or Rome. And meanwhile we have drilled in once more a simple combination (*have a house*) the units of which will stand the learner in good stead for the rest of his linguistic career. We have still further strengthened the foundation which is so essential to the foreign learner if he is going on to expand swiftly and safely. But this question of *foundation* deserves a chapter to itself.

## CHAPTER 5

### BUILDING UP

“Yes,” says the educationist, “our first task is to lay a sound foundation.” Probably no expression is more constantly on the lips of the training college lecturer; no precept is dinned more persistently into the ears of the trainee. And in most subjects, no doubt, practice has followed precept. Most successful, perhaps, of all the applications of this principle is the concentric method of teaching history and geography. We saw in Chapter 1 how it works out: in history — first the broad sweep of man’s story, then the filling in of detail; in geography — first the general outline of coastline and climate, then the filling up of blank spaces.

In other subjects too the teacher understands well enough what it means to proceed from the simple to the complex, from generalities to details. No teacher of science, for example, would dream of teaching organic chemistry before he had first ‘laid a sound foundation’ with the simpler analytical processes of inorganic chemistry. It does not occur to him to make a start with anything but the basic elements — hydrogen, oxygen, zinc, sodium, etc; and with the simplest compounds — water, iron-rust and so on.

In the drawing-lesson, again, infantile impressionism is the order of the day; detail is left till very late. The first steps in painting are concerned only with ‘primaries’. Let the child first learn to distinguish at sight between red and green. The shades of red — crimson, scarlet, vermilion, plum, ruby, maroon, etc; and

of green—olive, emerald, jade, etc. are for a more perceptive age.

Only in the teaching of language—language, on which all other subjects depend!—has foundation-practice so far failed to follow foundation-precept. No one, in any country, for any foreign language, has hitherto succeeded in 'laying a sound foundation', for the simple reason that no one has known just what that foundation should consist of, and just how it should be laid.

The painting lesson might indeed have afforded a working analogy—the colour words. First 'red'—then the shades of red: crimson, scarlet, vermilion, etc. First 'great'—then the synonyms of 'great': 'vast', 'enormous', 'tremendous', 'terrific' etc. Thus:

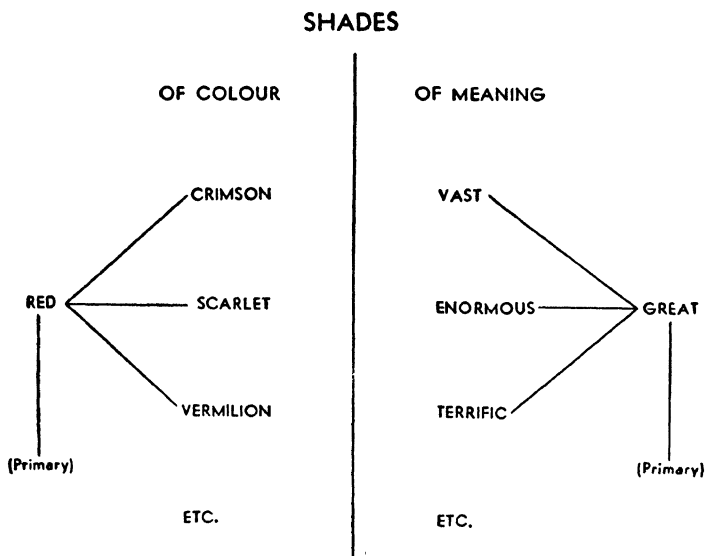


Figure 25. The Primary Words

But from a concrete qualifier like 'red' to an abstract concept like 'invention' is a far cry. 'Red', we can all be sure, is a foundation word; but who is to say whether 'invention' is or is not more fundamental than 'invitation'? And how much more complicated is the problem when we consider the intricate subtleties of grammar and idiom!

There is, for example, a course in English the first lesson of which consists of seven words only.

Stand up, please!

Bow!

Sit down, please!

What, apparently, could be simpler, more harmless, more 'common'? And yet six years later the 'standers-up', the 'bowers', and the 'sitters-down' will still be losing marks for writing

He approached the King and made a *bow-down*.

I was *standing up* at the street corner.

The man *fell down* from the second floor.

## Foundation Words

Perhaps the first thing the teacher in search of a foundation has to realize is that in language at least appearances are *very* deceptive — what *looks* simple is often far from simple, and what *looks* difficult may, in use, be quite the opposite.

Perhaps this partly explains why Basic, which in reality is so simple, is sometimes regarded as difficult. You tell someone that in Basic we do not 'eat our food' but 'take our food' or 'have a meal', and immediately he says, "But 'eat' is so much simpler."

And in the same way 'ask' is simpler, we are told, than 'make a request', 'can' is simpler than 'be able to', 'know' than 'have knowledge of', 'hit' than 'give a blow', 'use' than 'make use of' and so on.

But *are* they?

Here are some *typical* mistakes *actually made* in an Indian high school, after six or more years of instruction in English. The exercise was not a free composition but *reproduction*.

1. He could not able to go without the fish.
2. I am a poor little fish and will not use to you very much.
3. I like mutton only. I cannot eat with other animals' flesh.
4. The creature like fish neither got hands nor legs.
5. The fish apologized the fisherman to set him free.
6. My intention is that I am going to make you for my supper.
7. The fisherman replied the fish, "Everyone like to eat the fish."
8. He did not knew what the fish was talking.
9. God praises those who act good deeds upon the poor.
10. Why do you inflict pain to us poor creatures?

A moment's analysis of such mistakes may be instructive. In general it will be seen that many of them are the result not of knowing one set of words rather than another, but, on the one hand, of failing to distinguish synonymous meanings, and, on the other, of over-

looking differentiated constructions. Thus there is a natural tendency in the child who learns 'can' and 'be able to' simultaneously to run them together. They have the same meaning; why not use both? Hence 'could not able to'. On the other hand 'use' has many uses — 'be of use to', 'used to doing it this way', 'used to go', etc. Hence mistake No. 2.

3. If the child can 'take a book' he can 'take his food.' Then he will not 'eat with' animals' flesh.

4. (a) Confusion between 'the' generic (eliminated from learner's Basic) and 'the' definite.

(b) Use of 'neither.....nor' (eliminated from Basic) not properly grasped.

5. 'Apologize' used analogously with 'ask'. Basic would say 'made a request to'.

6. 'Intention' obviously not intended. Thinking Basically the child would have realized that what he was writing was equivalent to 'what I am going to do is that I am going to' etc.

7. (a) 'Replied' used analogously with 'told'. Basically it would be 'said to'.

(b) 'Everyone *like*', 'eat *the* fish' should be impossible after six years of English.

8. 'Talking' for 'saying', 'knew' for 'know'.

9. 'Act' for 'do' and wrong preposition.

10. 'Inflict *to*' for 'inflict *on*'.

## Elements First

'Laying a sound foundation' in English, as in science, means teaching the *elements* first. Just as hydrogen and oxygen are the elements of water, so are

'take' and 'food' the elements of 'eat'; 'be', 'able', and 'to' are the elements of 'can'; 'give', 'a', and 'blow' are the elements of 'hit'; and so on. The Basic learner builds up his ideas in synthesis, and only when he has got used to this can he be relied upon to grasp readily and accurately the synthetic ideas (such as 'eat', 'tell' and 'hit') which he must sooner or later learn.

Sooner or later? How soon or how late? Thanks to Panoptic Conjugation we do know now exactly what the foundation should consist of. Basic English gives us all the elements we require for a sound foundation. Now how should that foundation be well and truly laid? The answer is simple. By reading, more reading and still more reading. By practice, more practice and still more practice. By drill, more drill and still more drill. Reading and practice and drill all in the 850 words of Basic English. Reading and practice and drill unhampered by new words and new grammatical forms. Reading and practice and drill until perfect fluency and accuracy are achieved.

It is not enough to say: First we will teach the words with which the English child begins *his* linguistic career. That is indeed the most natural approach, and that is what the teaching of Basic implies. But mere learning is not sufficient. We have to ensure that before the learner proceeds to expand his vocabulary he is able not only to understand but to *use* his minimum child-language as fluently and as accurately as the English child uses his much larger vocabulary. All the grammatical mistakes which it is possible to make within the limited Basic grammatical framework must be eliminated before expansion begins. We might put it



this way. Here again (Figure 26) is our scheme for the teaching of English.

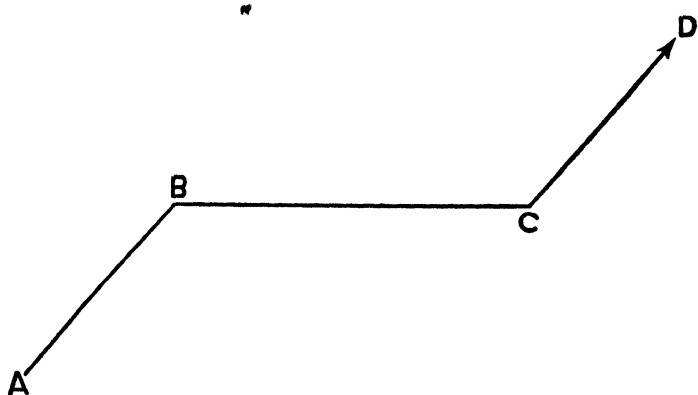


Figure 26. The Basic Scheme

AB. First we teach, with the books designed for the purpose, the 850 words of the child-language.

BC. Then we continue to read, practice and drill with the 850 words until we reach a point (C) where we can say that the learner now knows his child-language almost as well as his own. How long this perfecting-period will last depends on many factors — the number of lessons per week, the size of the class, the skill of the teacher, etc. But we may estimate, in terms of 'word turn-over', that it will need not less than forty books containing in all about one million words. Some of the books will be read at home in an hour or less. Others will be treated intensively and exhaustively in class, with the teacher extracting the maximum amount of practice from each — through

question and answer, through grammatical analysis and drill, through composition and reproduction.

CD. Having got as near to perfection as possible we now proceed to expand into the realm of adult words, explaining each one in terms of our child-language.

Or we might rewrite the whole of this plan for teaching substituting 'minimum Anglo-Saxon' for 'minimum child-language'. Having taught the learner Anglo-Saxon (AB), and having made him, through reading and practice, a fluent and accurate Anglo-Saxon speaker (BC), we go on to expand into the realm of French and Latin words (CD) explaining each one in Anglo-Saxon terms.

There is no other way of 'laying a sound foundation'.

I recall my own eight years of French at an English school — eight years during which I never read a line without a dictionary by my side. In eight years, that is to say, I never read a line of French that was not forced upon me, and until this day I have never read a French story, or a novel, or a play, with pleasure, from cover to cover. Till this day to utter a few words in French is an effort. Nor am I alone in this. The great majority of Englishmen will bear me out when I say that French at school was an unholy grind from the first day till the last. And why? Because we were never allowed to relax. We were never given a breathing space to assimilate, through reading and practice, the basis and essentials of the language. We never learnt to distinguish between the way the Frenchman talks and the way in which he writes. So that when we *have* to talk we still say, for

example, the French equivalent for "In this manner he had made a great fortune" instead of, more simply, "In this way he had become very well-off."

## Everyday Language

This brings me to my second foundation point. If we wish to lay a sound foundation in English the minimum vocabulary chosen must not only be *elemental*, so that the richness and variety of style aimed at later are not negated by mistakes such as those I have quoted; it must not only be *adequate to all the needs of everyday life*, so that the one-level practice period can be long and *generally* (not merely *linguistically*) useful; it must be elemental in the sense that it *expresses the needs of everyday life in the language used in everyday life*. That is, it must be simple, colloquial, homely. We have already seen how and why Basic fulfils this condition — because the most useful words happen to be, as a rule, the most simple words. But what I want to stress now is that the assimilation of elementals in the one-level practice period is essential not only for the sake of correct synthesis and analysis; it is perhaps still more essential for the sake of this distinction between 'speaking' words and 'reading' words. Such a distinction cannot be taught; it must be *implanted*. And the only way of implanting it is the one-level practice period. It works out in this way.

The words of any language may be classified, according to the use made of them by the speakers of that language, as:

- (A) *Friends*, i.e., words we not only recognize in reading but also use constantly in

speaking and writing, words which we are thoroughly familiar with and can 'call upon' at need. These are our speaking-words.

(B) *Acquaintances*, i.e., words with which we are on "nodding terms"; we recognize them when we meet them but we do not, as a rule, 'call upon' them to help us in speaking or writing. These are our reading-words.

(C) *Strangers*, i.e., words we neither recognize nor 'call upon'—because we do not know them at all. As we cannot understand them when we read them, we certainly cannot use them.

As in real life the circle of 'friends', for everyone, is the smallest of all; the circle of 'acquaintances' is larger; largest of all is the number of 'strangers' (*there are 500,000 words in the English dictionary*). This division of words is illustrated on the opposite page (Figure 27).

This is not of course a rigid demarcation. Throughout the learning process and, if we go on reading afterwards, throughout life, we are constantly turning 'strangers' into 'acquaintances' and 'acquaintances' into 'friends'.

But the chief fault of the present method of English teaching is that it does not define clearly enough which words are speaking words (words which *must* be our friends) and it does not give the pupil any opportunity to *make* firm friends with these before he goes on to enlarge the circle of his 'acquaintances' (reading

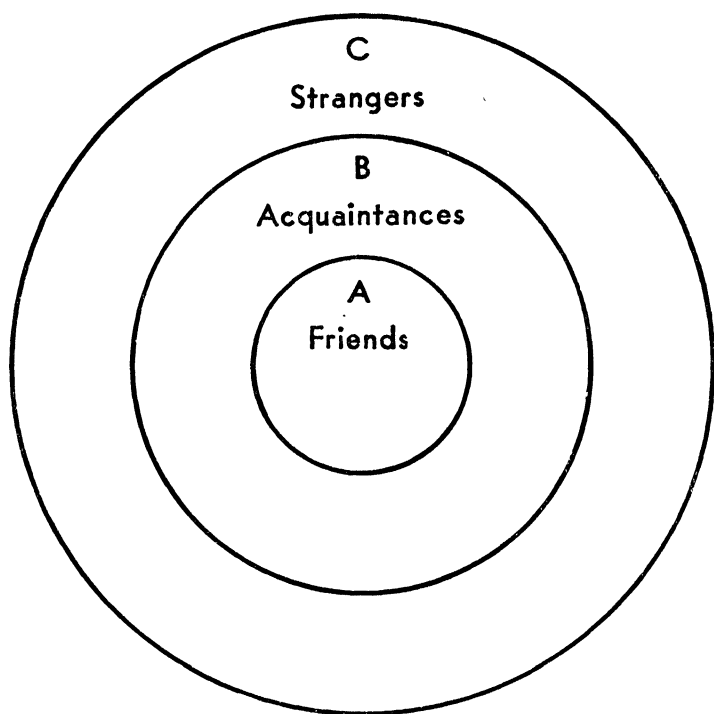


Figure 27. Friends, Acquaintances and Strangers

words). That is to say, friends and acquaintances are throughout the school period hopelessly jumbled up in one chaotic mass. We might represent that state of affairs as in Figure 28 (opposite).

We all know what happens when we try to make an acquaintance do the work of a friend; either we are snubbed or we get badly let down. This is what happens very often when we try to use a word we are not well acquainted with—we use it either in the wrong form or in the wrong context. Hence the mistakes! And hence the need for Basic English!

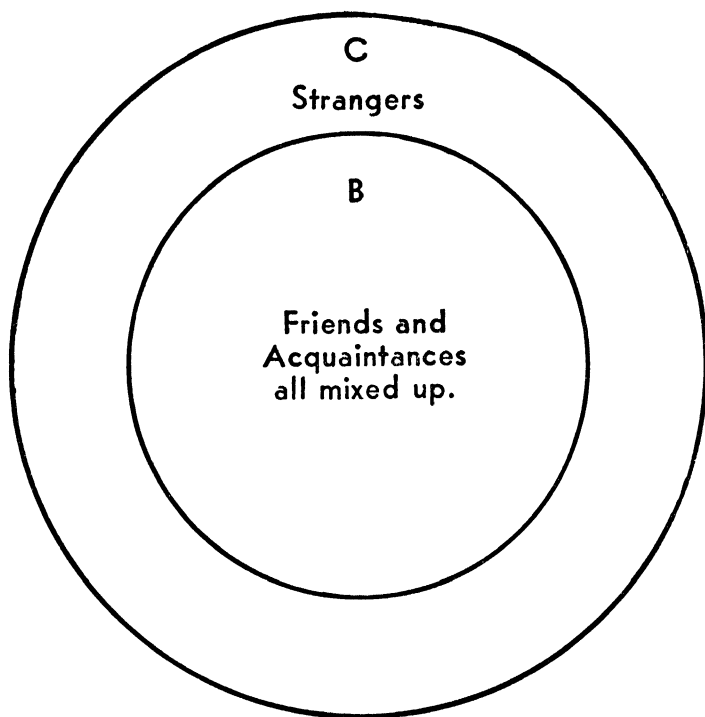
The great virtue of the one-level practice-period, from this point of view, is that it fixes indelibly, through constant drilling and repetition, the *must* friends. It gives the learner a firm nucleus of speaking words; it enables him to keep the two circles of speaking-words and the reading-words he will learn later distinct.

Thus, however 'shy' any learner may be with 'acquaintances' and 'strangers' he will *always* have his 'friends' to fall back upon to get him out of a difficulty. And because, though few in number, they can do so much work, they will never let him down.

## Expansion of Vocabulary

Assuming, then, that a sound foundation has been laid—what is the next step?

Medical science has taught us the great importance of giving to our babies the right sort of milk in the right quantities at the right time and at the right rate of increase. In the same way the new science of Orthology has now taught us the great importance of giving the foreign language-learner the right words in the right



**Figure 28. The Language Chaos**

number at the right time and at the right rate of expansion. Basic English is 'mother's milk'—pure, natural, made up of just those elements the 'baby' needs. But now he has to be weaned. What food shall we choose for him? How, once we venture beyond the Basic circle, can we know which are the right words and what is the right rate of assimilation?

The answer is suggested partly, by the diagram on page 28. Round the circle we tried to imagine written down all the 500,000 words in the English language, in groups of words that are related in meaning. Now, having taught the first 850 *selected* words, having been all round the circle *once*, we are faced with the same alternatives as before—should we start out to teach the remaining words *in their groups*, taking each group as a unit, or should we again select one word from each group, the next most important, and so quickly, go round the circle again?

And yet again the question has only to be put in this form to be answered. In making the transition from Basic to normal English we want the rate of expansion to be *even* for all the essential ideas. There is no sense in teaching *all* the synonyms for 'great' and 'noise' and, say, forty other Basic words, while all the rest continue to work over-time. Obviously that would give an unbalanced and confusing vocabulary, and much of the good achieved by the one-level practice period might be undone. What we want, in this stage, is two words where one had to do before; in the next, three words; in the next, four words; and so on. That is, we have to rank the words in each group in an order of diminishing importance, and take the next one on the list each time we go round the circle. The selec-



tion could not, of course, be made as mechanically as I have suggested, but these are roughly the lines on which the research workers at the Orthological Institute have proceeded, and the results of their research are embodied in the *Transition Books* designed for use immediately after the end of the one-level practice period.

The same considerations apply to grammar and idiom. Clearly it would never do to plunge the Basic-speaking foreigner straightaway into the ocean of English idiomatic and grammatical usage. He has to be initiated gradually, always on the principle of 'one thing at a time', so that at no stage does he feel overwhelmed by the difficulties of navigation or the immensity of the task confronting him. The *Transition Books* provide the necessary bridge between the English of the *Basic Trader of Venice* and the English of Lamb's *Merchant of Venice*. Further transition books will provide a bridge between the English of Charles Lamb and the English of Shakespeare himself. This is what I mean by 'building up'.

## Basic and the Teacher

But, I may be asked, can a teacher build up in his pupils a knowledge of English in this way if his own knowledge has not been built up in the same way? Or, in any other words, can a teacher who has not himself learnt Basic teach Basic and use Basic?

The answer is:

1. He can *teach* Basic without special preparation.
2. He cannot *use* Basic *freely* without special preparation.

3. The best preparation for the free use of Basic is to *teach* it.

What I mean is this. Basic is a selection, not a departure, from normal English. Certain words, idioms and constructions are eliminated, some are retained. To teach those that are retained the teacher has a course (*Basic Way Books I-IV*) which he will use with his class. If he starts from the beginning and takes each step as it comes, leaving nothing out and putting nothing in, he will be teaching Basic English — without knowing Basic English. He may not know, for example, that Basic excludes 'shall' and the generic 'the' etc., but he will not teach them simply because they are not there to be taught. Any teacher, using any introductory course, must restrict himself, in teaching, talking or questioning, to the words and forms that have already been taught in previous lessons. Otherwise, obviously, he will not be understood. Exactly the same is true of Basic English. Providing the teacher sticks to the learning books, and continually limits himself, in teaching any step, to the steps that have gone before, he needs no more special preparation than a teacher using, say, the *New Method Readers* or *Thousand-Word English*.

But suppose, on the other hand, that a teacher finds himself, at the beginning of the year, facing a class who have been through the four *Basic Way* books, who may be said therefore to know Basic English, and who are now entering on the one-level practice period. Obviously, to make himself understood, he must restrict himself to the 850 words, 250 idioms, etc., that is, he must know Basic English. If he has himself taught Basic English

through the *Basic Way* books he will of course have no difficulty in remembering what he has taught and what, therefore, he may use. If, for example, in telling a story, he finds himself about to say "When I *alighted* from the train" he will automatically remember that he has not taught 'alight from' and therefore, as his pupils cannot be expected to know it, he must say "When I *got off* the train." But here again there is no *need* for him to improvise stories of his own. If he sticks to the reading books provided, basing his questions and exercises on the same wording and subject-matter, he cannot go wrong.

It would be rather more difficult for a teacher who has not had a course of self-training in Basic such as is provided by the teaching of others from the beginning. But he is no better or worse off in this respect than a teacher who, never having used the *New Method* himself, is confronted with a class of *New Method* pupils. He can hardly be expected to know, off-hand, which words are in the *New Method* list and which are not. Therefore he must either make a special study of it or restrict himself to the wording of the book he has been asked to teach from.

But whichever course he adopts the teacher will no doubt, on occasion, make slips: he will unconsciously use a word he has no business to use. And this is just as likely to happen in the Basic lesson as in the New Method lesson. Fortunately, however, teaching English is not fraught with the same physical dangers as piloting an aeroplane. Even if the teacher, through ignorance or carelessness, does transgress on minor points it is no tragedy. There is no petrol to burst into flames; no parachute-jumping is called for! Nor is it a crime

punishable by law; neither teacher nor taught will find themselves in jail! The pupils will have heard a word which is not strictly necessary at that particular stage, one that they will not therefore meet in their Basic reading. That is all.

That is, just as a man can drive a car without knowing the first thing about its mechanism, so can a teacher start teaching Basic without knowing the first thing about its structure. But just as it is obviously desirable that a man *should* know something about the car he is handling so it is obviously desirable that the teacher using Basic should know something about the system he is using. If only to add to his own interest and enjoyment he should know, for example,

*why* he is using it,  
*how* to use it, and  
what *results* might be expected from his use  
of it.

He *can* teach it without having read this book, but I think he will teach it with greater zest and enthusiasm if he *has* read this book.

**PART TWO**  
**TEACHING PROBLEMS — THE BASIC APPROACH**



## CHAPTER 6

### ENGLISH – TEACHING-MEDIUM OR SECOND-LANGUAGE ?

If you agree with most of what I have said so far you will probably be wondering: Why, in all the hundred years that English has been taught in India, has no one thought of teaching it this way before? Why have we had to wait so long for a system like Basic English? It seems such an obvious solution. Our children have to learn not only how to *read* English, which is a fairly easy matter, but also how to *spea*k and *wri*te it correctly, which is much more difficult. They can learn to speak only by speaking, to write only by writing. To speak and write, they must have practice. The smaller the number of essential *speaking* words they learn, the more practice they will have with each. The English language is so constructed that it is possible to do a great deal with a very small number of words. These, then, will be our practice vocabulary; these will be the foundation of all our teaching. Once again, it all seems so obvious. Why has no one thought of it before?

The answer is fairly simple. The teaching of English has been hitherto, and is still to-day, largely directed by Englishmen or by Indians trained in England. All the more important posts — of directors, assistant-directors, inspectors, principals, heads of the big schools — were until quite recently filled by Englishmen, drawn from English universities and colleges. Now of all the universities and colleges in England there is not one that offers a course

for teachers in the teaching of English *as a foreign language*. There are, naturally, courses in the teaching of English as the mother-tongue; there are courses in the teaching of languages which are foreign in England, such as French, German, etc., but not in the teaching of English as a foreign tongue. This is not surprising; there are very few teachers in England, if any, who undergo training with the deliberate intention of teaching abroad. The appointment, when it is made, comes after, not before, their period of training.

What is the result? The result is that they have all come out here without ever having been forced to think, or trained to think, about English from the foreigner's point of view: they have not been taught to take into account his special needs, his difficulties, his reactions. They have been trained to teach English to English children. But teaching English children English is one thing; teaching Indian children English is quite another thing. So different are the two that the word 'teaching' can hardly be used in the same sense in respect of both. In England, where the child starts school with a stock of about 5000 words, where he 'lives' English all day and every day, where he is assimilating new words all the time without effort, 'teaching' English means simply guiding, directing, controlling, checking. In India, on the other hand, it means 'implanting'. The English child does not need any special selection of speaking words; he has them all. He does not need special practice; he gets it every time he reads, speaks or



listens. He does, as he gets older, need a dictionary, but until recently the need was so little felt that he was seldom taught to use one properly, and it is here, if anywhere, that Basic comes in so useful in English-speaking countries — in the *later*, not the *introductory*, stages.

However, so long as education in India was purely English, the results of this 'lack of preparation' were not so harmful, or at least not so obviously harmful. All subjects were taught in English, and the standard of English was correspondingly high. But in the course of the years it became apparent that this standard was artificially high, that it was being achieved only at the expense of the vernacular and the general knowledge subjects; and with the growth of national sentiment and a keener appreciation of the psychological disadvantages of a 'foster-mother-tongue' has come a growing demand for vernacular education.

What are, in fact, the psychological disadvantages of an educational 'foster-mother-tongue', or, in other words, of Bilingualism.

## Bilingualism

There was a time, not so long ago, when every educated European was bilingual. His language was French, or English or Spanish, but the language of science, of culture, *for all*, was Latin. As late as 1650 Milton was writing his political tracts in Latin, and no one thought it strange. As long as the nations were nations only in name, until Joan of Arc made 'France' France, and Henry VII made 'England' England, Bilingualism worked, and was

accepted as a natural state of affairs. It worked until the development of the national languages made it no longer necessary and then, gradually, because it was no longer necessary, it disappeared.

Very much the same has been the evolution of education in the East, with this difference — Bilingualism in the East has *not* worked. Bilingualism in the schoolroom may be said to work only when, while in operation, it prepares the way for the disappearance of the foreign tongue as the medium of instruction. After a hundred years of English in India and Burma, fifty years of English in Japan, and forty years of English in China, the languages of these countries are still far from being fitted to become the vehicles of modern education. Nor has Bilingualism succeeded in creating, in any of these countries, an intelligentsia capable of developing these languages. Why has Bilingualism failed in the East?

Bilingualism has failed in India, for example, because the differences between the Indian vernaculars and English are much greater than the differences between, say, medieval French and Latin. French *is* Latin. Bengali is very far from being English. So far, in fact, that it is utterly impossible for any but the most brilliant to gain a complete mastery of both. The perfect translator is very difficult to find. If he has had all his education in English, and as a result knows English well, his grasp of his own language will be correspondingly poor. If he has learnt English only as a second language in a ten-year school course it will be all but useless to him for cultural or practical purposes.

But far graver than the problem of translation is the problem of the psychological inhibitions, mental paralysis one might almost call it, which is raised by the *attempt* to foster Bilingualism.

The problem is stated very clearly and, I think, with truth, in Mr. Som Nath Chib's monograph *Language, Universities and Nationalism in India*, in which he says:

What is wrong with Indian students is that they cannot think. They have not learnt their own language; they have not been able to master the foreign one forced on them: they have fallen between two stools. When you take away the language of a community you take away its ideas too. All coherent thinking depends upon adequate expression of what we think. To write badly is to think badly. One who has not mastered any language is inevitably a bad thinker.

But, on the other hand, *English is needed*. "I think", says Mr. Chib, "that even if it was possible Indians should not do away with English" and he goes on:

Of course I do not suppose that it is possible, for India is a long way off from *swaraj*; but even after its attainment we could not afford to isolate ourselves from the main current of western thought. The world has become one as it was never before in world history. Our means of communication have become so rapid that a quick exchange of ideas is continually taking place. In order to keep pace with the march of events and the growth of new ideas we have got to link ourselves with the western world. English at the present

moment is the language of many countries, and will gradually become, even if the British Empire breaks up, the language of three-fourths of the whole world. Therefore it is in our best interests that we should retain English as a second language in the curricula of our educational institutions.

And then there is the outsider's point of view, as expressed by Mr. Braisford in his foreword to the same book:

I could understand and forgive a furious national reaction against the use of English in India. But that would be to impoverish unpardonably the intellectual life of India. No language today has a range so wide as English. It will open the New World no less than our little island. It will give Indians what they never had before in their history, a key to the other great civilization of Asia, for every educated Chinese knows English. *And finally, may I say, as a European who has enjoyed the hospitality and learned to appreciate the courtesy of Indians, that while they retain English as a second language, they render easier of access to the rest of mankind their thought and their national personality.*

Mr. Chib, while admitting the necessity for English, maintains, though in the face of hostile opinion, that if English were reduced to the status of a second language (like French in England), and if the time thus saved were devoted to the teaching and use of the vernaculars, the standard of English would *not* deteriorate — “A young student who knows his own language well has better chances of mastering a foreign language than one who starts with an

uneducated mind, who has not learned to think coherently.”

This has certainly not been the experience of those schools in the East where English has been so reduced, and one shudders to contemplate what would become of England, for example, if her people had to rely on their knowledge of French to fathom the New World and to transmit ‘to the rest of mankind their thought and their national personality’.

I am heartily in sympathy with Mr. Chib’s ideas; I fully agree with him that a child should not begin to learn a foreign language until he has a secure hold on his own (age 10 plus); I readily endorse his view that English must take second place in the curriculum. But I say that if, under such conditions, the teaching of English is to have any value at all it must be based on an organized plan. For in general it may be said that the later the child begins to learn English, and the less time he has to give to it when he does begin, the more urgent becomes the need for these things we have been talking about—for word-selection, for *speaking*-words, for practice with them, for systematized expansion through them.

## Second Language Status

Nevertheless, despite the fact that vernacularization without a change of method, it seems to me, *must* entail the lowering of an already low standard of English, educational authorities are inclining towards it as the lesser of two evils; it is better, they say, that the child should be clear-headed in one—

his own — language, than that he should be muddle-headed in two! They have begun from the bottom. In the primary and middle departments education is now given in the vernacular; in the higher forms and universities it is still, largely, in English.

But it was not until after the process of vernacularization had begun in real earnest that the 'unprepared' English educationist really began to feel uncomfortable, was really forced to think about what he was doing. Unfortunately for India and Indian education his thoughts took the wrong direction. How — and why?

Until this time he had been teaching English more or less as a mother-tongue, in the way he had been trained to teach it in England. Now he found, in the lower forms at least, that it was no longer to be the mother-tongue; it was to be reduced to the status of a second language. He had to teach it, or advise on its teaching, as a second language.

What experience had he to guide him when he found himself thus unexpectedly in front of a class of Indian children who knew no English and had only one or two periods a day to learn it in. What foreign languages had he himself, as a schoolboy or a student, learnt? Latin probably, French almost certainly.

The way in which he had learnt Latin could not be much of a guide. Latin is a dead language, like Sanskrit. Indian children learn how to read Sanskrit, but not how to speak it or even to write it, simply because they will never need to speak it or write it. 'The aim is *reading*, the reading of certain classical

books. The vocabulary is there, fixed and immutable, and whether they get there by this route or that does not much matter. Reading a dead language can be learnt only through translation; speaking and writing are not required, so no practice is required. So it is with Latin in England. Again, as with English in England, the need for selection, for practice, for systematic natural expansion (Latin through Latin) is not felt. So the learning and teaching of Latin is no guide.

But what about French? French is a living language. Surely anyone who has learnt French in England should have some idea as to how to teach English in India? French is indeed a living language, but for all the *practical use* to which it is put by the great majority of Englishmen it might just as well be dead. Of all the children who learn French in England not one in a thousand ever uses it or needs it in after-life. They do not need it, as Indian children need English, to get jobs, or to get knowledge which they cannot get in their own language. French in England, for most children, is a sheer luxury. English in India, conditions being what they are, is, for all children, a harsh necessity. That is the difference. How is it reflected in the teaching of the two languages? The aim of French in England, its whole justification one might say, is, first and foremost, *French literature*, the French classics. The emphasis, though less pronounced than with Latin, is also on *reading*, the reading of certain books for cultural purposes. The method, though less rigid than with Latin, is also,

largely, translation. Here again, then, the need for selection, practice, natural expansion, has not been so urgent as to start teachers thinking along 'Basic' lines.

Educational authorities in India are indeed realizing that the aims of the French teacher in England are not and *cannot* be those of the English teacher in India. What Indian children need above all is a 'working' knowledge of practical English, not a 'luxury' knowledge of literary English. Nearly all will have to 'talk shop' in English; very few will have occasion to 'talk Shakespeare'. If they can get both 'shop English' and 'Shakespeare English' all well and good. If they cannot one has to be sacrificed; and there is no question, for the great majority of children, which it should be.

### **Confusion of Method**

That, as I say, is now being realized. But realization is not enough; adaptation must follow. So far it has not followed. Hence the tragedy of English teaching in India today. Examiners, inspectors, teachers are still, though uneasily, pursuing the 'literary' way, under changed conditions which make the road impassable and the goal unattainable. The result is that the child gets a hold neither of 'shop English' nor of 'Shakespeare English'. He leaves school, after a most unhappy grind, unable to *speak* English and unwilling to *read* English. Forced to attempt everything in the end he gets nothing. He gets nothing because the aims of his teachers are confused, and this confusion is reflected in an utter



confusion of method over the whole field of English teaching.

Necessity being the mother of invention, it was this confusion of aim and method, brought about on the one hand by the growing *practical* importance of English, and on the other by the increase of nationalist sentiment, that has now given us Basic English and the Basic Way to English.

Basic was the invention of a group of men who *deliberately*, for the first time in history, looked at English *from the foreigner's point of view*. Fully aware both of the growing international importance of English, and of the new nationalism which, though needing it, yet resents it, they set out to 'boil English down' to a language which is still English but can be learnt for reading purposes in a month and acquired for speaking and writing in a year. They set out to invent an international language; in giving the world that, they have given the English teacher in India, and in all countries like India, a weapon which blasts away the present confusion of aim and method as dynamite blasts rock; a sort of touchstone by which every theory may be tested; a compass by which every step may be guided; a systematic plan of action into which all the seemingly irreconcilable elements of English teaching neatly and inevitably fall.

It is our task therefore to show how the introduction of Basic clears away the mists of confusion in which the English teacher now finds himself. And first we take up the most vexed question of all — what should be the *aim* of English teaching?

## CHAPTER 7.

### AIM — UNDERSTANDING OR EXPRESSION?

When a man suddenly finds his income halved, as many have done in these days of depression, his first thought is to examine his expenditure: which are the items whose elimination will cause least hardship?

In the same way when the English teacher found half, or more than half, his periods taken away from him (including those devoted to other subjects taught in English), his first thought was to examine his time-table: which were the items which could be eliminated with least loss? There are, of course, four items in language teaching:

Understanding (Passive Knowledge)

1. Hearing — Understanding the spoken word.
2. Reading — Understanding the written or printed word.

Expression (Active Knowledge)

1. Speaking — Expression of thought by the spoken word.
2. Writing — Expression of thought by the written word.

If something had to go, which of these items should it be?

Foremost among the teachers of English in India has been Dr. Michael West. He has not only taught English in India, but he has thought about

its teaching, he has conducted research into its teaching, he has written books about its teaching.

Now Dr. West, confronted with this problem, agreed that something had to go. Like Mr. Chib, and most educationists, he saw that Bilingualism, in the fullest sense of the word, is neither possible nor desirable. Indeed, he adds another argument against it. People, he says, who neglect their own language in order to get command over another are torn from the foundations of their emotional life:

However fruitful the foreign language may be in respect of knowledge and thought it can never possess for them the intimate emotional significance of the language of the home. They grow up, therefore, intellectually educated but emotionally sterile.

### 'Active' and 'Passive'

But he drew a distinction between *active* Bilingualism and *passive* Bilingualism. After showing that an active command of English (all four items) can be acquired only at the expense of the vernacular, he maintained that the sacrifice was unnecessary. The need of the foreign learner in search of knowledge, he states, is a passive need:

It is only the very few, of greater intelligence, linguistic aptitude and opportunity, in any country who have occasion to converse with foreign peoples in their own languages. The *average* boy has neither the ability nor the opportunity to learn a foreign language in this way — nor yet has he the need. If he succeeds his success is useful to him only in so far as it enables him to read the foreign language — a

power which (as we shall see) he might have achieved in far less time and without any sacrifice whatever.

*The essential need of the average Bilingual child of a minor language is simply that of reading ability in one of the major languages to supply the informational and scientific deficiency of his national literature.*

In his book, *Bilingualism*, Dr. West quotes statistics to support this view. Out of every 2,407 Bengali-speaking persons, for example, only one speaks English; but for every one book published yearly in Bengali there are 45 published in English. *Therefore*, he concludes, the Bilingual child does not so much need to *speak* his foreign language as to *read* it.

This conclusion is backed up by three further contentions:

1. That it is easier for the average pupil to learn to read than to speak and write. Therefore, while all pupils should be taught to read, speaking and writing should be reserved for the more gifted pupils.
2. That the technique best employed for the development of reading ability differs from and is simpler than the technique best employed for the development of speaking and writing.
3. That in any case the initial stage in learning a foreign language should be to learn to read it — even for the student who aims at complete mastery (of reading, writing and speaking.)

Thus everything points to the desirability of teaching the child to *read* first — it is his most important need, it is easiest and therefore takes least time, and, if the pupil is sufficiently gifted and circumstances permit, it can later be used as a foundation for a more active command of the language.

The next step was to work out suitable textbooks for the teaching and learning of reading. The books available were not suitable because of the "complete absence of any principles in their construction" — there was no attempt at word-selection, grading or spacing out. What the child needed first in his reading were the most common words.... And so we got the *New Method Readers*. And with the *New Method Readers* we got back to something very similar to the teaching of French in England!

The argument *seemed* all very logical, but it contained, as the reader may already have perceived, one very serious and fundamental flaw.

'Ought' is not 'Is'

It is no doubt true, as Dr. West says, that out of every 2,407 Bengali-speaking persons only one speaks English. But it is equally true that nearly all the 2,406 who do not are so illogical and perverse as to want to be the one that does, or, if they are parents, to hope that at least one of their children will be the one that does. But perhaps they are neither so illogical nor so perverse as some would have us believe. Because in a country where *every* career depends on an active knowledge of English, and must, it seems, so depend for a long

time to come, it is natural for a student to put such a knowledge in the forefront of his programme. Nor will any parent believe that *his* children are so 'average' as to be incapable of acquiring such a knowledge — until they have failed in their exams! And by that time, unfortunately, it is much too late to go back to reading for reading's sake!

This fundamental fallacy, on which the whole *New Method* edifice is based, was revealed very clearly, I think, by the late Mr. Champion:

If India today were a nation governed by the rules of logic, and governed politically by a dictator, it might be practicable to contend that while all secondary school pupils should be taught to read, only the more talented should be taught to speak and write.

He who would deny to the average pupil the acquirement of speech and writing is a person with an undeveloped sense of reality. The only rule, sound in theory and workable in practice, is that the ability to speak and write English and the ability to read English should be regarded as of paramount and equal importance.

All of which I heartily endorse, except for the 'should' in the sentence: 'neither *should* be set above or below the other, either in aim or in practice'.

For that 'should' implies that there is a distinct and understandable temptation to promote reading ability, because it is simpler, at the expense of the other items. Mr. Champion does indeed say explicitly, "We may agree that reading ability can be more easily acquired than speaking or writing ability, for it accords with our common experience." Neverthe-

less, he adds, that which convenience makes desirable conditions do not always allow...

This is not my view. For I believe that not only was Dr. West's fundamental argument fallacious, but his three subsidiary contentions, which appeared to justify what convenience made desirable, were equally untenable. I hope to show, in fact,

1. That at least in the early stages of learning English it is neither easier nor more difficult to develop ability to read than it is to develop ability to speak and write; the two abilities go hand in hand.
2. That the best first stage is not a training in reading but a training in speaking.

But these questions belong rather to the discussion of method than of aim, and to the question of method I must therefore now turn.

## CHAPTER 8

### METHOD — DIRECT OR INDIRECT ?

If Dr. West's contentions had been correct we might have expected that children brought up on the *New Method* system would at least be fluent and enthusiastic readers. They might have the feeling that something was lacking, that they had been deprived of an opportunity to compete on equal terms with other children in the matter of examinations and careers. But they should at least have cause to thank him for their ability to read and for the joy they experience in reading. But do they?

After visiting a large number of schools, some where the *New Method* was in use, others where it was not, I have come to the conclusion that with a few exceptions *New Method* pupils do not read more books than other pupils; they do not read with greater fluency; nor do they read with greater enjoyment. Not a few schools, in fact, have abandoned the *New Method* in favour of the old-fashioned type of reader.

The *New Method* system may still be in use in a large number of schools, but any Inspector will testify that it has failed to achieve any marked success; progress is not so very much more rapid than it was before: the results are not so very much more permanent. Why?

Because, in the first place, most teachers agree with Champion and not with West with regard to the aims of English teaching. With them it is not



merely a question of theory or belief. Committees, examiners, inspectors, parents and children — all demand an *active* knowledge of English, and they, the teachers, have to supply that demand. They may have accepted the *New Method* books but, whether they have been conscious of the inconsistency or not, they have tried to use them as a basis for speaking and writing. The result of rejecting the theory and accepting the books has been — chaos; and this brings us to the question of *method*. For just as it has been commonly (though unjustifiably) accepted that it is easier, *at all stages*, to learn to understand a language than it is to get command of it, so it has been commonly (though unjustifiably) accepted that the technique best employed, *at all stages*, for the teaching of understanding differs fundamentally from the technique best employed for the teaching of expression.

How does the technique differ, or rather how is it held to differ?

### Do and Say

It is agreed that the pupil can learn to speak only by speaking. If the aim, therefore, is speaking, every vernacular word used in an English lesson, whether by teacher or pupil, is a second wasted. Every English word used, by teacher or pupil, is a step forward.

How can the teacher ensure that most of the words used in lesson-time are English words? By doing what he would have to do if he did not know the vernacular, namely,

- (1) point to things and give their names,
- (2) point to pictures and give the names of the things they picture,
- (3) carry out actions and say what he is doing,
- (4) explain all other English words using only the English words he has taught by methods 1, 2 and 3.

What are the alternative methods? They are the methods used for teaching Sanskrit — reading of the original Sanskrit, translation into the vernacular, all explanations in the vernacular. There are of course things, rules of grammar and composition, which have to be explained in the vernacular, whichever method is in use, but obviously it is desirable, if the aim is speaking, that there should be as few of them as possible. But can we, in fact, so regulate their number as to reduce it to a minimum?

Obviously we can. We can say, for example, that the words we choose to teach in the first few lessons, or *all* our lessons, will be words that can in fact be taught by pointing (to things or pictures), by explanation in English.

We can, that is to say, dramatize our lessons by basing them on *actual experiences* in the class-room, by keeping close to reality, by doing and saying nothing which cannot be related to the pupil's five senses of sight, hearing, smell, touch and taste. Whether we are talking about a plate on the table or a cloud in the sky every lesson can be a drama, with every character saying his part. Only through such 'living experience' can we make the lesson, and the language, live.

## Method and Material

Now there is no doubt as to which method most teachers prefer. Most of them are practical enough to know that what their pupils *need* is what they *want*; most of them are sensible enough to realize that 'learn to speak by speaking', as an injunction, is fatuous, because there is no other way in which the pupil *can* learn to speak; most of them are human enough to prefer teaching a living language *as* a living language.

So that when they were offered a series of 'new method' readers they took *new* to mean *direct* and overlooked the fact that the books were primarily meant to be books for the teaching not of speaking but of *reading*. They did not realize, as many have now been forced by bitter experience to realize, that in order to use the direct method you must have special 'direct-method' words and 'direct-method' presentation, that is, *concrete* words that can be related to the pupil's classroom experience. Nor did the word-counters (West, Faucett, Palmer etc.), make it sufficiently clear, in my opinion, that their courses were *not suited* to 'direct-method' treatment.

For what sort of words did in fact emerge from the 'word-counting' laboratory? In the first place we saw that they tended to be *reading-words*, not speaking words at all.

The authors of *The Interim Vocabulary Report* do indeed say, in their introduction to the *Report*:

It was recognized that the results of such counts, which were based on the reading rather than the speaking vocabulary, might

require some modification if they were to be useful for purposes of language-production (i.e., speaking and writing) as well as for language-reception (i.e., reading and hearing).

But the point is that so far they have *not* been modified — and not one teacher in ten thousand, I suppose, has read the *Report*!

Hence the pathetic attempts — foredoomed to failure — of ‘dramatization’ based on words and expressions which are seldom used on the stage of English life itself!

Secondly we saw that wherever we ‘drew the line’ we found, above it, a large number of synonyms. Now we may or may not agree that ‘shut’ should come before ‘close’ or ‘go in’ before ‘enter’. But we will all agree that whereas both ‘shut’ and ‘close’ may be taught through action and command the difference in meaning between them cannot be so easily demonstrated. We can hold up a thick book and a thin book and teach ‘thick’ and ‘thin’ without resort to the vernacular. We cannot hold up a *large* book and a *big* book and explain the distinction between them (if any) without resort to the vernacular. And so, for example, with ‘say’, ‘speak’, ‘tell’, ‘state’, ‘express’ and ‘mention’.

Thirdly we decided, because word-counting is arbitrary and unscientific, that *wherever we drew the line* we should not find above it all the words needed to explain or define those below it. In explaining or defining therefore we are again forced back either on unsatisfactory explanations or on the vernacular.

In general it may be said that, in the early stages of English teaching, every reading-word, every

synonym, every word chosen haphazardly, will force us back on the vernacular, however devoted we may be to the direct method in theory.

Had the word-counters realized fully, at the outset, that teachers would *persist* in trying to use the direct method, not realizing that the material was not suitable, they might perhaps have modified their results immediately, or at least have attempted to make the best use of their material. But that they did not realize these things is only too evident from the book they have produced.

### The Ant in the Shoe

Let us compare a page from a *New Method Reader* with a corresponding page from a *Basic Way* book. Each is the eighth lesson from the first book of their respective courses. Two learners each pursuing one of the two courses would have given about the same time to English, and would have learnt about fifty words. The new words in the *New Method* lesson are 'shoot', 'shoot at', 'noon' 'shoe' and 'shoes'. The *Basic Way* lesson is reproduced on page 169. Which lesson, do you think, lends itself most easily to 'dramatization'? Is it possible to 'point and say' or 'do and say' anything at all on the basis of the material in the *New Method* lesson? Is it possible, let alone desirable, to shoot or even to shoot *at* a hen or an ass, or to put an ant in somebody's shoe?

And as for 'keeping close to reality' how many Englishmen do in fact go about shooting or even shooting *at* hens or donkeys, and putting ants in people's shoes? How many go about shooting any-

thing? From the material of the first seven lessons it may be taken for granted that the learner has not yet learnt to make the simplest statement, or to express the simplest need, with reference to the things around him. Yet the author considers it essential, at this stage, to fall back on the vernacular, for a considerable part of the lesson, in order to explain the distinction between 'shooting' an ass and 'shooting *at*' an ass, because it is quite certain the teacher will not be able to explain the note at the bottom of the page *in English*. The note reads as follows:

'He shot the hen' means he hit it and killed it.  
'He shot *at* the hen' means he aimed at it and fired in the direction of it; perhaps he hit it, perhaps not.

This is not a 'freak' lesson, selected to put the *New Method* in the worst possible light. Any reader who cares to go through the *New Method* books will find instances in plenty. Is it any wonder that, after four or five years of English, children following this method find themselves hopelessly muddled?

Now look at the Basic lesson. Is there anything here which cannot be 'dramatized'? Is there anybody, in real life, who does not, at one time or another, have to put things on plates, or in pots, or into their mouths? Is there a single 'unessential' word? Is there any necessity to fall back on the vernacular for something which is not vital to freedom of expression at this stage?

This 'closeness to reality', this 'concreteness', is not as we have seen, an incidental or super-added advantage of the Basic vocabulary. It is inherent in

8

apple, berry, egg, food, fruit, nut, orange, pot, some, sugar, with.



An egg.



Eggs. Some eggs.



This egg is with an orange.

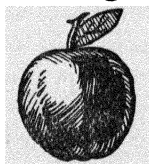


This is a berry.

and



this is a berry



This is an apple.

An apple is fruit.

A berry is fruit.

An orange, an apple, and a berry are fruit.

A nut is on this plate with a berry and an egg.



This is a pot and this is a pot



Some rice is in this pot. Some sugar is in this pot.

Rice and sugar are food.

Bread and fruit and nuts are food.

Food is in the pots.

I take some food with a spoon.



I put some rice in my mouth with my fingers.



Figure 29

the structure of the system; it is a logical result of the methods employed in selecting the words. In Chapter 3 I showed that the first words to be eliminated were the 'shorthand' words that are twice removed from reality ('accelerate' for 'go more quickly'); then the fictions ('liberty' for 'free' in relation to a person or thing); and then the 'suggestion' words, those that express feeling as well as make a statement ('modesty', 'diffidence', etc.). What then could the word-residue be if not concrete and close to reality?

But there is no need to labour this point—the relation between method and material. One has only to go into the schools and watch teachers at work with the *New Method Readers* to see how material determines method. Here and there, it is true, one does find a teacher, evidently a fanatical Direct Methodist, still struggling manfully in English to shoot the hen and extract the ant from the shoe. Most have long since given up the attempt, and translation pure and simple, of words *and* sentences, is the order of the day. Indeed one need not even trouble to go into the schools. Dr. West has, more recently, himself emphasized that his course is a *reading* course by bringing out a parallel New Method Conversation Course, *Learn to Speak by Speaking*, starting with things on the teacher's table and going on to flowers (Lesson 7) and horse-riding and donkey-riding (Lesson 10).

The publishers' catalogue puts it like this:  
Dr. Michael West, the author of the well-known *New Method Readers*, has been experimenting for a long time with the problem of



teaching English Speech. The result is the *New Method Conversation Course*. It is based on a careful study of speech vocabulary, and a clear distinction is made between 'words we speak with', i.e., the common words which are the necessary basis of all conversation, and 'words we speak about'.

What conclusions can be drawn from this other than that the *New Method Readers* themselves are *not* based on a careful study of speech vocabulary, and that in them a clear distinction is *not* made between the 'words we speak with' and the 'words we speak about'?

The question we have to ask therefore is: Is this Conversation Course an *alternative course* or an *additional* course? Dr. West, as I have said, maintains that the main aim of English teaching in countries like India and Burma 'should be to develop reading ability, and not ability to speak and write the language'. Is the Conversation Course then simply a weak concession to the popular demand for active *command* of the language, as opposed to a mere passive *knowledge* of the language?

This should be made clear, because it is a common experience to find teachers, apparently unaware of the distinction, using only *one* of the courses as a basis for *all* their work, including both reading and conversation. How dismally they fail to make conversation out of the reading books we have already seen. But the results of doing the opposite, limiting reading to the conversation books, are equally disappointing. The *Conversation Course* does, it is true, include in its 1000 words no less than 666 from the

Basic list, which is a much higher proportion than will be found in the *Readers*, and 57 of the remainder have been asterisked as 'worthy of inclusion'. But it also contains, in addition to the usual synonyms, more than one hundred irregular verbs, and these in themselves, apart from the difficulty of teaching, are sufficient to make the list useless as a vehicle of serious thought. Thus we can hardly expect a spate of books, written within the limits of this 'speaking' vocabulary, in any sense comparable with *The Basic Bible* or the Basic version of Bernard Shaw's *Arms and the Man*, any more than we can expect a *New Method Bible* within the limits of the first 1,000 words of the *New Method Readers*.

### **'Reading' and 'Conversation'**

Sometimes, on the other hand, one finds both courses in use: reading (*i.e.*, translation) in the morning, conversation (with a different set of words) in the afternoon. What hope is there, under such a system, of that co-ordination between the spoken and the printed word which is the basis of all sound teaching? So accustomed have many teachers become to this artificial 'time-table' distinction between 'reading' and 'conversation' that it is difficult to persuade them there is neither justification nor need for it. Even in schools where Basic has been introduced, for example, one finds that out of sheer habit (so much stronger than logic or argument!) only one lesson a day is devoted to the text (Basic); the other is occupied with a 'conversation subject', prepared by the teacher, based on a different set of words. And yet all the words needed for 'conversation' are in

the books; the teacher is merely anticipating a lesson (for conversation *and* reading) that has been marked down by the authors for later treatment. He is simply departing from the order worked out by the experts, and to that extent is not getting the best out of the books. Suppose, for example, the teacher is taking Book 1, Step 6 ('At The Table') as 'text' (morning lesson), and wants to take as his subject for conversation on the same day (afternoon lesson) 'The Family' or 'My Family'. Later he will be surprised to find that 'The Family' is the topic of Book 2, Step 6. He is simply taking it out of its natural order, instead of following Book 1, Step 6 with Book 1, Step 7.

The point I have so far been trying to establish is that the *New Method Readers* have failed to produce good readers largely because teachers have not been content simply to produce good readers. They have tried to produce good speakers (writers) at the same time, but by attempting to utilize reading books for direct method purposes they have robbed the books of whatever value they might have had as readers, while at the same time they have not succeeded in producing good speakers. Because of the confusion of *aim* the *method* of the *New Method Readers*, as readers, has not been given a fair chance. And the question we now have to answer is: Suppose this method *had* been given a fair chance—would the results produced have been much better?

### The 'New Method' Technique

Let us see exactly what this method is. The *New Method Teachers' Handbook* lays down the following procedure for the teaching of reading, speech and writing:

## I. The Teaching of Reading

The children turn to the list of new words given in the *Companion*.

1. The teacher reads each English word in turn; the children read it after him and learn to say it correctly. [N.B.—Apparently the intention is that the children should learn to read and pronounce correctly a list of words whose meaning they have not yet learnt!]
2. The teacher writes the vernacular meaning on the blackboard; the children copy this into their *Companions*.
3. The list of English words is then read over, with the vernacular meanings, two or three times. (The teacher may tap with a pencil to keep the time.)
4. The *Companions* are closed. The children turn to the list of new words given in the lesson in the *Reader*. The children simultaneously or individually (as ordered) read the English word and supply its meaning.

*Reading Sentences.* First underline the words in the sentences as directed in the *Reader*.

1. The children read a sentence (muttering). Some teachers find it helpful to read the sentence aloud first to ensure correct pronunciation.
2. The teacher asks a question (in English or vernacular). The children underline the answer.
3. The teacher says, "Pencils down," then announces the answer in writing on the blackboard.

4. The teacher says, "Hands up those who have it right."
5. One child reads the sentence and supplies the meaning.

## II. The Teaching of Speech

Although the *New Method Readers* are not, apparently, "based on a careful study of speech vocabulary" the *Teachers' Handbook* also gives directions for their use in the teaching of speech:

In the *New Method* system the speech work follows the reading at an interval of about one book. Thus, when the class is reading *Reader 1B*, it is doing speech and writing based on the *Primer*; when the class is reading *Reader 2*, it is doing speech and writing from *New Method Composition I* (based on the vocabulary of *Reader 1B*). Since it is easier to learn to read than it is to learn to speak, this interval in the later stages tends to become greater, so that a class which is reading *Reader 5* may be studying *New Method Composition Book 3*. If the interval between reading and speech becomes inconveniently large some periods are temporarily transferred from reading to speech work until the speech work catches up.

## III. The Teaching of Writing

No writing is begun until the children have read the first few lessons of the *Primer*; they then do simple copying, learning to form the letters. Apart from this initial copying, the Writing always follows the Speech; the children write what they have already learnt to say.

That is to say, the order of work for any particular lesson is as follows:

1. Reading (words)
2. Translation (words)
3. Reading (words and then sentences)
4. Writing (copying)
5. Speaking
6. Writing (Dictation and exercises)

This is the indirect method; as I say, it is something like the way I learnt Latin and French at school, with what results I have already described (Page 134). As such it may be contrasted with the method suggested in the *Basic Way Teaching Book*, which is outlined as follows:

## **The Basic Technique**

### **1. The Teaching of Speech**

“The teacher may point to his head, his neck, his arm, his hand, his leg and his foot, and, as he points, say ‘head’, ‘neck’, ‘arm’, etc. He may then invite a learner to come in front of the class and point to the different parts of his body, naming them as he does so.

“He may then point to the learner’s head and ask other learners in turn to say ‘head’, and pointing in turn to the learner’s neck, arm, etc., get different learners to say ‘neck’, ‘arm’, etc. He may then reverse the process, saying the words and getting the learners to point to the parts named.

### **2. The Teaching of Reading**

“The learners may next be told to look at the book. They should read aloud the words ‘body’, ‘head’

'neck', etc. after the teacher and point to the body, head, neck, etc., in the picture as they read. Then different learners may be asked to read the names of the parts of the body in turn.

### 3. The Teaching of Writing

"Next the learners may write the names in the order in which they appear in the book."

The order of work is therefore

1. Speaking by the teacher (pupils learning to understand the spoken word)
2. Speaking by the pupil (learning to use the spoken word)
3. Reading by the teacher
4. Reading by the pupil
5. Writing (copying)
6. Writing (dictation and exercises)

### The Basic Lesson

The suggestion is that before the pupil sees any word in print or attempts to write it he should *first* hear it used by the teacher in a number of different contexts and himself learn to use it in similar contexts. Suppose, for example, the teacher is going to take Book I, Lesson 8 (See page 169). He comes into the classroom armed with an apple, a berry, an egg, a nut, an orange, a pot and some sugar. He arranges them on his table. *He orders that all books should be closed.* Then, holding up the egg, he begins:

T. This is an egg (Repeats 'egg' several times).

What is this?

P. That is an egg.

T. Where is the egg?

P. The egg is in your hand.

T. Where is the egg? (Puts it on the table)

P. The egg is on the table.

T. What is the egg on?

P. The egg is on the table.

T. You (name), put the egg in the box. What do you do?

P. I put the egg in the box.

In the same way he drills with the other objects, teaching incidentally that an orange and an apple *are* fruit, that food is taken *with* a spoon, etc.

The pupils are now in the same position, with regard to the words in this lesson, as an English child who has not yet learnt how to read. He knows the words; he has heard them and used them many times; but he has not learnt how to read them. The first task of the infants teacher in the English school is to teach his pupils to recognize in print the words they already use in speaking. And that is now the task of our 'apple and orange' teacher.

Having assured himself, by question and answer (the children putting questions as well), that the words are understood and can be used without hesitation he orders books to be opened. Then, with the children following carefully, he reads out the lesson, slowly and distinctly, so that the children can correlate the *sound* of the words and sentences they have learnt with their appearance on the printed page. Then the children, individually and collectively, read the lesson after him, sentence by sentence, and he checks the pronunciation until mistakes are eliminated. That is the end of the second stage.



The third, writing, stage begins, again as in an English classroom, with a review of the words, the teacher stressing any idiosyncracies (*e.g.* 'appul' has two 'p's', 'ul' is spelt 'le'; *shigar* is spelt with an 's', etc). The children first copy the lesson, and then come dictation, exercises, written answers to oral questions and so on.

This is the direct method as it was intended to be used, and with the help of real objects, card-board models, or pictures it can be successfully employed to teach a large proportion of the Basic words. The use of the vernacular is confined to *explanation* of grammatical difficulties ('my' and 'your', 'a' and 'the' etc.) and to drive home the points picked up unconsciously in conversation. No learning of lists, no translation, and above all no *muttering*!

### The New Method Lesson

Actual experience in the classroom has proved over and over again that children *enjoy* the Basic type of lesson, but are bored by the *New Method* type of lesson. Every advance in modern educational technique is based on the 'interest' principle—that the child learns much more easily and quickly when his interest is aroused. Now I have watched many an ass being shot (in theory) and many a note being sent to a tent at noon. And never have I seen anything like the stir and bustle that one would expect such happenings to occasion. All I have heard is something like this:

Teacher	:	Shoot!
Pupils	:	Shoot!
Teacher	:	What does it mean?
		(Silence)

Teacher : It means ——. What does it mean?

Pupil 1 : \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher : Again!

Pupil 2 : \_\_\_\_\_

(Teacher asks six pupils to repeat the vernacular word)

Teacher : He shoots an ass!

Pupils : He shoots an ass!

Teacher : What does it mean?  
(Silence)

Teacher : It means ———.  
What does it mean?

Pupil 1 : It means ———.

Teacher : Again!

Pupil 2 : It means ———.

So it goes on. The pupils are bored; the teacher is bored; and I — I am reminded of my school days!

And so I say that *even if our aim is only to teach reading it is best to teach it by speaking first.*

If this is true of the procedure in any one lesson it is, I think, still more true of the procedure in the English course taken as a whole. I do not deny, of course, that "the reading power of the pupil soon outstrips his speaking and writing," whether in his own or any other language. I made that sufficiently clear, I hope, in my 'friends — acquaintances — strangers' analysis in Chapter 5, and I hope to make it clearer still in my next section — on Balance. But I say it is wrong to go on from this to argue that *therefore* reading (translation) is the best foundation for the English course as a whole. It is not the best foundation because it is, quite simply, boring, and *even if our ultimate aim*

is to develop reading ability only we should not risk boring the pupil at the outset of his course.

For these reasons I have come to the conclusion that even if the *New Method Readers* had been given a fair chance by the teachers handling them the progress would not have been so rapid, nor the gain as considerable, as their author contemplated. Apart from the defects of word-counting as such the method recommended is entirely out of accord with modern educational theory. Indeed, so 'unreal' is Dr. West's aim, and so unsound is his method, that one cannot help feeling that both have been largely determined by his material. It is possible that having worked out a vocabulary which is predominantly a reading vocabulary he was led to make reading the aim of English teaching and to adopt translation as the method of achieving it.

But this is by the way. The points we have to bear in mind are:

1. That under normal circumstances, whether the aim is reading or writing or both, the best method of teaching English in the early stages is the direct method, because it is the most natural and interesting, and

2. That Basic English, because it is predominantly a speaking vocabulary of concrete picturable words, is the only introductory course that really does lend itself to direct methods of teaching.

Basic English, that is to say, is easier to teach by the direct method.

### Basic by Indirect Method

Having said that it remains to show that under circumstances which make the use of the direct method impossible or unnecessary or undesirable the disadvan-

tages of the translation method are in any case almost entirely eliminated by the Basic approach. That is to say, Basic is easier to teach by the direct method, but with Basic the direct method is not so essential. Why? Because the teaching of Basic includes the one-level practice period, and the number and variety of books provided for the one-level practice period enable the teacher to prolong it indefinitely, until, in fact, the pupil has learnt to *think* in Basic English, that is, in English.

The initial disadvantage of the translation method is that the learner does not think directly in English; he thinks first in his native language and then translates his thought into English. He does not associate the English word with the object which it symbolizes; he associates it with the vernacular symbol of the same object.

But the theory of the translation method is that after a time, by force of constant repetition of the English word, the vernacular symbol fades into the background, and a direct relationship between English word and object is achieved. We might represent that process as in Figure 30 (opposite).

If a French learner, for example, who has learnt a list of words in the New Method way, is asked to name the object B the word which at once jumps into his mind is CHAISE (C) which he then translates into CHAIR (A). At first it may take him some time to recollect the English translation. But each time he reads it the time needed to recall it is diminished; the connection becomes less and less indirect until, through repetition, the word has become so familiar that a direct connection between object and 'chair' is established and

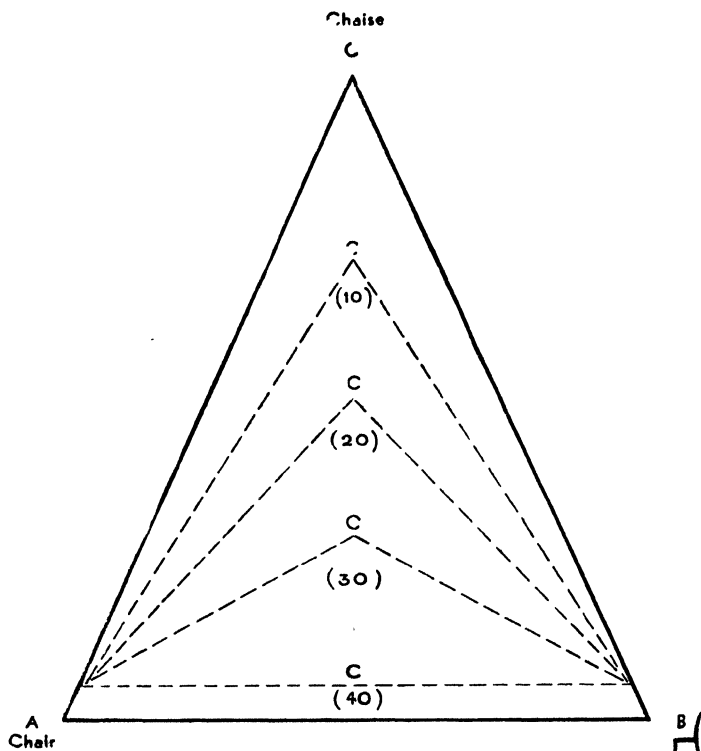


Figure 30. The Translation Theory

the line ACB is flattened out into AB. In the diagram I have assumed that a word has to be met forty times before direct connection is established, but obviously in practice the number will depend on many factors — the ability of the learner, the *frequency* of repetition in relation to the total number of words learnt and read. and so on.

But the principle is clear — the establishing of a direct connection depends on repetition. Why, then, has the translation method failed? Because it has not, as a rule, provided sufficient opportunities for repetition; the learner is confronted with so many ACB situations in such rapid succession and over such a long period of time that with a few exceptions ('the', 'and', 'in', etc.) he is unable to flatten out the lines in any of them. And so till the end of his course he continues to translate, instead of learning to think directly. The distortions of grammar and idiom that result from this are too well known to need mentioning.

Now suppose the teacher is confronted, at the beginning of a new school year, with a 'catching-up' problem. More than half his class have reached a certain standard; the rest are new boys who have learnt no English at all. He cannot spare the time to go over the whole course again for their sake. So he does a very daring and most unpedagogic thing. He gives each of the new boys a list of the Basic words with their vernacular equivalents and tells them the meanings have to be learnt by heart, parrot-fashion, in a month — 28 words a day. Having duly learnt the words the new boys are allowed to take part in the lesson. The class happen to be reading *The Trader of Venice*. The new boys can barely follow. They know all the words, but there are many other things they do not know — extensions, idioms, grammar — things that have been thoroughly taught in the *Basic Way* books. *The Trader of Venice* is definitely a sore 'trial' for them. But the teacher explains a few things here and there; others they pick up as they go along, and so they come to the end. Then the class turns to *Robinson Crusoe*, also in

Basic. A few more points are explained; a few more points are picked up. The words themselves have become more familiar; understanding has become easier. It becomes easier still with *The Gold Insect*; *Gulliver's Travels* prove quite entertaining; *Schoolboys of Early Times* can be read at home at a sitting; and thus, by the time they have read twenty or thirty or forty books, all in Basic, the new boys have caught up, the gap has been wiped out, and the whole class is ready to go on to 'expansion'.

The one-level practice period has done its work of repetition so thoroughly that the initial disadvantages of the translation method have been overcome, and the fatigue and boredom involved in learning a dull list of words (that would have been avoided under normal conditions) have become but a memory which will in its turn soon be effaced. That is why I say that in the teaching of Basic, if that teaching is made to comprise, as it should, the one-level practice period, the direct method is not so essential. The method of the *New Method Readers* is feasible, though not desirable, with Basic; it is not feasible for the *New Method Readers* themselves!

Now experience has shown that a class of average size and intelligence, with the average age about nine, need not take more than a year or a year-and-a-half to get through the *Basic Way Books I—IV*. In these books they will learn the 850 words and their uses, the 250 idioms and all the grammar that is considered necessary in an introductory stage. The length of the one-level practice period will depend on the thoroughness with which the *Basic Way* books have been taught, and the amount of time that can be devoted to reading and

to conversation and exercises based on the reading. But it may safely be assumed that if, by the end of the third year, after some thirty or forty books have been tackled, the class is not reading and conversing fluently and correctly, then there must be something seriously wrong either with the teacher or with the class itself. The class should be talking as easily and correctly, though not of course with the same range of vocabulary and idiom, as an English class of the same age.

### Return to Essentials

Clearly, if the English in the average Anglo-vernacular school in India is judged by this standard, the need for catching up is not confined to certain sections of certain classes in certain departments; it extends to all sections of all classes of all departments. For I have been in no school where English is taught as a second language and found the English even in the high school approaching perfection. On the contrary, the list of mistakes on page 130 is typical of the sort of English that passes for 'fairly good'.

What 'fairly good' means after six years of English may be judged from the remarks made by a High School Final Examiner in his report on the answers in the 1938 Examination — taken after *ten* years of English. Some *common* mistakes, he says, are:

reached at, died with, dead with, did not afraid,  
did not satisfy with, stock for stork, patience  
for patients, safe for save, save for safe, pre-  
vent for protect, ask that, ask to Jupiter,  
Rustom sword for Rustom's sword, cholera  
broke up, decease for d'sease, chased at, the



another bear, struck. . . The uses of 'shoot', 'fire', 'gun' and 'charge' were confusing indeed.

. . . the usual mistakes in tenses, lack of agreement between subject and verb in number and person, the wrong use of prepositions, etc., occur far too often. . . It would appear that much more systematic drill in the use of tenses is necessary.

It follows then that the need for the one-level practice period is not confined to new learners. However 'advanced' the class may be there is still need, and it is still not too late, for a *return* to a simpler level, for a period of drill in the essential words and constructions through reading and more reading and still more reading.

I am often asked whether a knowledge of normal English does not preclude the possibility of such a return. Will not the non-Basic words and constructions already acquired interfere? That is like asking: Is it possible for one who is learning to sail a boat on the open sea, and is finding the conditions too much for him, to make a fresh start in the calm waters of an inland lake? Would it be beneficial?

After many years spent in teaching English I did in fact come to look upon the language, with its half-million words, its infinite capacity for the coining of new words and expressions, its bizarre spellings and other difficulties, as a vast, uncharted and unbounded ocean full of submerged rocks and treacherous currents.

Across this ocean the teacher attempts to pilot his little crew of learners. Navigation is so difficult and repairs so numerous that there is no time or possibility

to enjoy the trip, and it is hardly to be wondered at that every pilot, sooner or later, loses heart, and that most of the crew lose interest.

Now, for the first time in history, language scientists have succeeded in constructing a little artificial lake of language, artificial in the sense that, while the water is the same natural sea water, the boundaries are well-defined, the further shore is well in view the whole time, the worst of the rocks have been removed, and navigation has been made easy, rapid and enjoyable.

Naturally the learner who 'returns' from the open sea will bring with him memories of the dangers and difficulties experienced there, of half-learnt unnecessary tricks that he will attempt to employ on the lake. It is for the teacher to point out that they are unnecessary, that they cause more trouble to the novice than they are worth, and that there are simpler alternative ways of getting the boat along. And if he concentrates on making his crew expert in the simpler alternative ways the memories will begin to fade and the crew will navigate the boat as he wishes them to. Then, when they have become quite expert, he can venture forth to the open sea again, subjecting his charges to gradually increasing difficulties, which he meets *one by one*, until there is no further need for his guidance.

But I have not yet fully explained my view that Basic is the best approach even to a *passive* knowledge of the language as a whole, and that in order to develop reading ability it is neither necessary nor desirable to withhold an active command of the language from the pupil. This takes us on to the question of — Balance.

## CHAPTER 9

### BALANCE — SHAKESPEARE OR SHOP?

The aim laid down by Dr. West for the teaching of English had two distinct aspects:

1. That the general policy, *for* any one school or *for* any one class taken as a whole, should be to emphasise *reading* ability rather than ability to speak and write.
2. That *in* any one school or *in* any one class whatever speaking and writing *is* permitted should be reserved for the more gifted pupils.

This new orientation was justified by three contentions:

1. That it is easier to learn to read than to speak and write.
2. That it is easier to teach reading because the method (translation) is simpler.
3. That reading is the best foundation for all purposes.

In reply to these contentions I have tried to show:

1. That the most interesting and natural way of *learning to read is through speaking*.
2. That the really alive and up-to-date teacher will not care to teach a living language more or less as a dead one.
3. That reading is *not* the best foundation if it is based on a reading (word-counting and therefore unlimited) vocabulary.

But what I have said applies, obviously, only to reading in the early stages. Once that stage has been passed it *is* true that the teacher's task will be simpler

and time will be saved if all *additional* vocabulary is allowed to remain passive.

The development is, or should be, similar to that of an English child. When the English child first goes to school he has a large active vocabulary but no passive vocabulary at all; he can speak but he cannot read. Shortly after he has learnt how to read he begins to acquire a passive vocabulary, that is, a vocabulary of words that he understands in reading but does not use. (A typical sentence, taken from a Junior Reader, is 'He viewed the prospect with dismay'). In 'the course of years of reading his passive vocabulary grows much larger than the active; he now has far more 'acquaintances' than 'friends'.

My suggestion for the foreign learner is that at the outset the sustaining of interest demands that active and passive vocabulary should more or less coincide.

It is only when a stage has been reached when he has all the words necessary for simple self-expression that the question arises: To what extent should new additional vocabulary be made active?

Because there is no doubt that if we remained content with a minimum instrument of expression we should get much further with understanding. If, that is to say, all the time now devoted to pronunciation and 'grammar and composition', once the introductory stage has been passed, were devoted to learning the meanings of new words, we could take 'shop English' more or less in our stride and quickly go on to 'Shakespeare English' and the classics. If, on the other hand, all the time now spent on literary English (poetry and prose) were given to practice in writing and speaking (conversational English) the standard of expression would be so much

the higher. It would not necessarily be more correct; but it would be richer in synonyms and idioms and more developed in style.

There is thus, in the later stages, a real problem of balance: on which, for any one class taken as a whole, is the emphasis to be laid — on understanding or expression?

We have already seen how this question is answered in England with regard to French, and how Dr. West would answer it for India. In England no one has any doubt that the emphasis should be on — understanding. We have also seen that the needs of the English child with regard to French are entirely different from the needs of the Indian child with regard to English. For certain reasons the Indian child must be able to use English as well as understand it.

### Culture and Earning-Capacity

Nevertheless all will agree it would be a pity if the child were to leave school a complete stranger to the beauties of English prose and poetry. Man does not live by bread alone; some culture 'for its own sake' is desirable. There is thus a real question: How far, for any class taken as a whole, should 'earning-capacity' be sacrificed to 'culture'; how far should 'culture' be sacrificed to 'earning-capacity'?

This question is complicated by another. So far we have been talking of "any one class taken as a whole." But a class is made up of individual pupils. Some, the minority as a rule, have a talent for language; others, *most*, have not. Some master new words very quickly; for others it is a slow and painful process. The few could be given 'culture' without sacrifice of 'earning-

capacity', the many could acquire it, in school, only at the expense of 'earning-capacity'. How may a balance be struck, in the later stages, between the claims of those children who will be mainly 'readers and hearers' and the claims of those who will also be 'talkers and writers'? Should the cultural needs of the few be sacrificed to the practical needs of the many? This again is a real problem, and here again Basic has something new to say.

*All* the children, without distinction, can and will learn the 850 words etc. in the AB learning period; *all* the children, without distinction, can and will learn to use them correctly, in speaking and writing, in the BC practice period. The distinction begins to be felt only when we come to the non-Basic words in the CD expansion period. *All* the children will learn to read and understand them, getting their meanings through Basic definitions. But the linguistic talent of any one pupil will show itself in the extent to which he succeeds in *using* the new words in his speaking and writing. The more talented the pupil the more he will tend to make each new word active. He will, for example, not merely know that 'insert' means 'put in'; he will say or write 'insert' when he might have said or written 'put in'. On the other hand, the less talented the pupil the more he will tend to let each new word remain passive. He will know that 'insert' means 'put in', but in speaking or writing he will tend to stick to 'put in'.

Let us take the extreme case of a pupil who never gets away, in speaking or writing, from the Basic vocabulary. What will happen to him if he goes up for his High School Final, let us say, and produces a com-

position entirely in Basic? Show any examiner the number and variety of books written in Basic, ask him what would happen, and he will say, as many have said: "A good composition in correct Basic English is far more likely to succeed, other things being equal, than a bad composition in incorrect 'complete' English." Most examiners are sensible enough, we must believe, to realize that the average Anglo-vernacular school cannot hope to teach 'style'! What they look for is accuracy, in word-meanings, idiom and grammar, rather than richness of vocabulary.

Actually, of course, such a case is extremely unlikely. Even the least talented pupil, in a course lasting years, will graft some non-Basic words on to his Basic stock. But the point is that whether he does or does not he will always have that stock, and they are all that he needs for complete self-expression.

How does this affect the 'culture — earning-capacity' problem? It affects it in this way. If we start off in the Basic way, however deeply we may later choose to delve, for the sake of the few, into the beauties of English literature, the many will *always* have their Basic 'minimum instrument of expression' to fall back on at need. When we have 'put something by' for a rainy day we can afford to be more lavish with our time and money. The teacher who has ensured that *every* pupil will be able to 'talk shop' freely and correctly on any subject at any time can go on with an easy conscience to give, to those who are fitted for it, the ability to 'talk Shakespeare'.

This applies as much to the class 'taken as a whole' as to the individuals who compose it. The problem of 'balance' arises only when there is no sound and self-

sufficient foundation. Given such a foundation the rest is only a question of time — less time, less Shakespeare; more time, more Shakespeare — for all! Given such a foundation there would be no need even to consider, as is suggested by the High School Final Examiner I have quoted, whether the text for detailed study should not be dropped altogether and the examination be based on Pure Composition and questions on a fairly large number of books prescribed for general study.



## CHAPTER 10

### PRONUNCIATION—SOUND OR SENSE?

If, I have said, expression is to be directly related to experience (the fundamental principle of the direct method) the experience itself must be vivid and natural. Looked at from this point of view some of the primers, 'first steps' and introductory courses now in common use seem to be more like crossword-puzzle clues than ordinary common-sense English.

The judge knew all the knaves.

I poured the juice into the urn.

The quill of the quail falls and the queen gets it.

These sentences are taken at random from a little primer of 75 pages which, we are told, is "intended for use in the Third Standards of Anglo-Vernacular Schools in Burma". Teachers are asked "to make every use of the pictures, which will help considerably both in reading and conversational lessons". Now there may be social circles where quills and quails, knaves and urns, are common subjects of conversation, but I have yet to come across them. Here again, before the child has learnt to make the simplest statements or ask the simplest questions about the things around him, he is asked to learn (through translation) and make use of (in conversation) words which the Englishman himself uses perhaps on the average *once a year*.

But there is some method in this approach, as there is indeed in shooting asses, sending notes to tents at noon, and putting ants in people's shoes. The method is dictated by an almost tragic awareness of the difficulties

of English spelling and pronunciation. One can only suppose, in all charity, that the purpose of "quills, quails and queens," in the first few lessons of an English course, is to drive home the irrefutable fact that in all these words the letters 'qu': whatever may come after, are pronounced 'kw'. Because the vowel sound in 'shoot' happens to be the same as in 'noon' and as in 'shoe', asses must be shot, notes sent to tents at noon, and ants be placed in shoes. There is no escape! And since the child must, sometime or other, learn *all* the words the Englishman uses, however rarely, what difference does it make if 'quill' is taught before 'quite' or 'quail' before 'quiet', 'ant' before 'apple' or 'noon' before 'number'? This, evidently, is the argument. We see the same thing in Tipping's *Rapid Readers* where, in Book II (teaching the 251st word to the 450th) the child is fed, as he is in Hodges 111, with 'shaven and shorn', 'tattered and torn', 'all forlorn', 'crumpled horn', etc. (in "The House that Jack Built," Page 31) when he has still to come to grips with words like 'left', 'straight' and 'easily' (page 32). Progress, it seems, may be rapid though erratic.

"Children," says Tipping in the introduction to his *Rapid Readers*, "like poetry, and it is good for them to read and learn some from the very beginning" — for the sake, one must suppose, of the rhythm, of the pronunciation. On the same principle we find children in kindergartens 'sing-singing' nursery rhymes about 'kittens' and 'mittens' without any attempt even being made to explain to them the meaning of what they are chirping.

Thus do we find sense sacrificed to sound. Is it 'necessary'?

## An 'Island' English

If we ignore Basic and the Basic Way; if we deny the existence of a simple 'island' English set amidst the shoals and currents of 'oceanic' English; if we forego the advantages of the 'practice plateau'; if we assume that the child must and can, before he leaves school, learn *all* the words the Englishman uses; if we say that the order in which he learns them is *not* important — then it may be necessary. (Though we might point out that even under such circumstances the results, after decades in which sense has been sacrificed to sound, are so bad that a sacrifice of sound to sense could hardly produce worse). But why *should* we ignore Basic, if it can do the same for pronunciation as we have seen it can do for vocabulary, namely, provide a framework of essentials to practice with first, build upon later?

Why do children read badly? Why the painful pauses, the mistakes in pronunciation, stress, rhythm, intonation? Let us grant that there are difficulties of sound-formation that can be overcome only by explanation and phonetic drill. These must form part of any course. But in themselves, clearly, they are not enough. They may be negated by teaching the wrong words before the essential few are assimilated. They may be strengthened and exploited by teaching the right words first, by practising with a few before going on to the many. That is to say, there are other reasons for bad reading apart from physiological difficulties. What are they?

First and foremost, we believe, Indian children read badly because they learn to read by letters, not by 'look and say'. Here again, as with the direct and

indirect methods of teaching word-meanings, we cannot enter on a prolonged discussion of the relative merits of the 'alphabetical' and 'look and say' methods of teaching word-sounds. Suffice to say that the 'look and say' method not only has the support of scientific research; it is almost universal in English-speaking countries. Why then is it not being used here?

Because before pupils can 'look and say' they must be able to 'do and say'. Before the child can learn to read any word or group of words by 'look and say' he must know their sounds and their meanings; he must be able to understand them when he hears them, say them when he needs to say them. But we have seen that the type of reading book commonly in use, based as it is on what is primarily a reading vocabulary, does not provide adequate opportunities for learning words by 'do and say'. The pupil learns by 'read and translate', or 'translate and read'. That is to say, he does not learn to correlate the sound of a word already known with its appearance, *as a unit*, on the printed page. On the contrary he learns the word (sound, spelling, meaning and all) straight from the printed page. Each new word is a jumble of letters which, pronounced in the way he has learnt them while learning the alphabet, frequently make up a sound quite different from what it should be.

Hence the difficulties! The pupil, let us say, has read and learnt the word 'shoot' with its correct pronunciation. What is more natural than that when he comes to the word 'blood' he should pronounce it 'blued'? He has learnt 'ass'—and so we get 'br-äss'. First impressions are strongest, and a mistake once made tends to persist a long time.. Learning words by 'do

and say ' ensures that before the child sees them in print he has heard and used them so often in speech that however bizarre their spelling may be he cannot forget the sound-habit he has acquired. He may wonder, but he cannot go wrong. This is what we mean when we say that pronunciation is determined by the choice of words.

Even so, the 'sound *versus* sense' problem would not be so easily solved if, like the word-counter, we used a 'limited vocabulary' which is limited only in name. We have said, not once but many times, that by using a vocabulary which is complete in itself we can stick at that one level until each word has been met and used so often, and in so many different contexts, that the child achieves perfect command over it.

If this is true in relation to *meaning* it must also be true in relation to *sound*. If the child, in a given period, has to pronounce a word one thousand times, he will in the end pronounce it more correctly, with less doubt and hesitation, than if he has to pronounce it only one hundred times.

### **' Stress ' without Strain**

Nor must we lose sight of the relationship between meaning and sound. To speak or read English correctly the stress has to be put on the right syllable for the sound and on the right word for the sense. To know which are the right words to stress the pupil must know their meanings. That is, he must be able to take in the meaning not only of the individual words he is reading but of the whole sentence at a glance. Not only must he be familiar with the words; he must have practice in 'reading ahead'. But how can he get this practice if

every passage he reads contains new words only just learnt or half-learnt or not 'earnt at all? Can he be blamed for the painful pauses, the broken rhythm, the faulty intonation, when every other sentence contains a 'new' word? Saying the same word one thousand times may give him the correct pronunciation, but only the reading of it in a thousand different contexts can give him fluency.

So much for 'sense'. But what about 'sound'? Here again, with regard to stress and rhythm, not only the number but the *kind* of words he has to use has an important bearing on the problem. The Basic words are not only easy to 'do', they are also easy to 'say'; and their number is so small, and their behaviour so straightforward, that rules are possible which would have little value, as such, for any other selection from the English language.

We have said that to get a natural effect stress has to be put on the right syllable of each word. Of the 850 Basic words no less than 513 (the most frequently used) *consist of one syllable only*. With these words the stress cannot be misplaced — because there is nowhere else to place it. For 254 out of the other 357 the rule is: *The stress is on the last syllable but one*.

<i>e.g.</i> raison, simple	..	(two syllables)
example, important	..	(three syllables)
education, automatic	..	(three syllables)

All but 22 of the rest come under three simple heads, and the 22 which might give trouble can be learnt by heart in half-an-hour and reeled off, parrot-fashion, in half-a-minute.

## CHAPTER II

### GRAMMAR — CONSCIOUS OR UNCONSCIOUS?

As with meaning and pronunciation so with grammar. In no field of English teaching is there more confusion, more uncertainty, more blindness to the real factors involved. Should we, or should we not, teach English grammar? This is the question that writers of text-books set out to answer. The fact that usually they answer it (sometimes 'yes', sometimes 'no') entirely without reference to word-selection, or to what we might call 'method' in its broader aspects, shows how little they understand the real problem. The problem is essentially a simple one.

Grammar has two aspects — 'formal' and 'functional'. Formal grammar is concerned with the naming and classification of the parts of speech (parsing) and of phrases, clauses and sentences (analysis). Functional grammar is concerned with the correct use of the parts of speech (accidence) and the construction of phrases, clauses and sentences (syntax).

Now a knowledge of functional grammar may be acquired 'consciously' or 'unconsciously'. Look at these two sentences:

He came yesterday  
He has already come

In the first we have the 'past simple' tense, used with an adverb of past time; in the second the 'present perfect' is used, with an adverb of present time. The Eng-

lish child of five has never heard of 'past simple' or 'present perfect' (formal grammar). No one has ever explained to him the distinction between them, the rules that govern their use (functional grammar). Yet he uses them correctly. Why does he use them correctly? Through sheer force of example. He has heard them used correctly so often that they come naturally to his lips. He knows them without knowing that there is anything special to know. He has, that is to say, an 'unconscious' knowledge of grammatical usage. If, later, he learns grammar at all, whether formal or functional, he learns it as a special subject — the science of language. For the English child, clearly, practice precedes theory.

Or a knowledge of grammar may be 'consciously' acquired. In this case the child is taught that 'came' is called the 'past simple' tense; 'has come' the 'present perfect'. The teacher explains the rule governing their usage: the 'past simple', he says, is used to describe an action in past time which has no relation to, or effect upon, the present situation. "He came *yesterday*." Where he is now we do not know; he may still be here; he may have gone away again. On the other hand, the teacher goes on, the 'present perfect' is used to describe an action in past time which has some effect on the present situation. When we say 'he has come' we are not interested in *when* he came. It may have been yesterday or last week or last year. It doesn't matter. What we are interested in is the fact that *he is here now*. The 'present perfect' is therefore really a present tense, not a past tense at all.... And so on. Then more examples, followed by exercises of various kinds.



Clearly a knowledge of functional grammar, acquired consciously in this way, implies a knowledge of formal grammar. You cannot teach (or rather it would be difficult to teach) the *use* of the 'past simple' and 'present perfect' tenses (functional grammar) unless you have first taught their *names* (formal grammar). This is made clear by every school syllabus, which sets aside a number of lessons for 'grammar and composition'. Grammar here, we must assume, means formal grammar, which is linked up with composition exercises or, in other words, functional grammar. For the Indian child, therefore, the distinction between 'formal' and 'functional' grammar is unimportant. If he learns grammar at all it must be both. The question is: Should he be made to learn grammar (in general) at all? Can he, like the English child, learn to speak and write correctly unconscious of the rules he is applying? Or must he learn the rules and consciously apply them?

It is clear that the closer the conditions under which he learns English approximate to those under which the English child learns English the less necessary it will be for him to learn grammar. Thus when English, educationally, was the mother-tongue of India and Burma, grammar was not, from the practical point of view, necessary. English was taught by what we might call the 'natural method'; the child was so thoroughly *swamped* with English that some of it could not but stick, and if grammar was taught at all it was taught, as in England, as a special subject in itself. The question arises in an acute form only when English is reduced to the status of a 'second language', that is, when the opportunities for practice are halved or quartered. And here again we see the evil consequences

of the 'direct-method-based-on-reading-vocabulary' inconsistency.

### **Grammar and the Direct Method**

The direct method is obviously an attempt to reproduce in the Indian classroom (English lesson) the conditions under which the English child learns English. The necessity for grammar will vary in inverse ratio to the success of that attempt. The more successful the attempt, the less the necessity for grammar; the less successful the attempt, the greater the necessity for grammar. The 'Direct Methodists' who succeeded the 'natural methodists' were quite confident that they *could* reproduce the same conditions. So confident were they that despite the reduced amount of time available, or perhaps because of it, they resolutely set their faces against the teaching of grammar. Their children could, should, and would, by dint of practice, by sheer force of example, by learning to speak by speaking, learn their grammar unconsciously.

But we have already seen what happens when a teacher tries to link the direct method with an 'indirect' vocabulary. It becomes a predominantly translation method. There is very little practice, very little example, very little speaking. The pupils learn grammar neither unconsciously nor consciously. They do not learn grammar at all. And so we have the atrociously ungrammatical English which is so common throughout the East. And hence the cry 'Back to Grammar', as if that were going to solve the problem!

Once again, this problem, like all others, cannot be solved without reference to word-selection, one-level practice, natural expansion.

In the first place, if you have a minimum word-list which *can* be taught mainly by the direct method, and which *can* later be used to explain and define all words outside the list, then more English will be spoken and the necessity for grammar will be so much the less.

Secondly, if you deliberately set out to provide opportunities for grammatical practice, without the learning, side by side with this, of new words, the necessity for grammar will again be so much the less. As Dr. West himself says:

The errors of children, especially in the earlier stages, are due not to ignorance of what is right but to confusion. They have so many things to think about at once (choice of words, order of words, agreement) that they are unable to attend to all of them.

Unfortunately the word-counting systems themselves offer a very remarkable choice of words!

We have already seen the value of the one-level practice, or repetition, or consolidation period from the point of view of fixation of word-meanings (Chapter 1) and word-sounds (page 199). But words can be used only in sentences, in grammatical constructions. The children cannot meet, and use, words without meeting and using them in constructions. As often as they meet and use the words so often will they meet and use the constructions. If in the one-level period they read, and use as a basis for conversation, forty books instead of one 'supplementary reader' they will read and use forty times the number both of words and of constructions. With grammar, as with words, it is *practice* that makes perfect. Here again we may echo Dr. West, when he

The remedy for an inaccurate class is not more grammar, but more practice within the vocabulary already acquired.

But unfortunately, again, practice means many books of definite educational value, and it is in these that the *New Method* system is so, unavoidably, deficient.

Thirdly we have to remember that in Basic the grammar is *simplified* and therefore *easier* to learn unconsciously. This simplification takes two forms: quantitative and qualitative.

By eliminating, or postponing, slight distinctions which are difficult to teach and learn we leave so much more time for practice with the essentials. Not having to learn 'shall' and its relationship with 'will', the learner has more time to make sure of 'will' and its relationship with 'would'. Not having to learn 'were' (subjunctive) and its relationship with 'was' (indicative) the learner is more free to concentrate on 'were' (plural) and its relationship with 'was' (singular). And so on. That is what we mean by quantitative simplification.

### 'Basic' Constructions

But perhaps even more important than this is the stress placed in Basic on constructions which are historically 'basic' to the language. We have referred, for example, to the 'past simple' and 'present perfect' tenses. How, in fact, did the perfect form of the present tense come into existence? This is the account as given by Bradley in *The Making of English* (page 67).

"When it was desired to express, more definitely than could be done by the simple past tense, the sense of what we call the perfect or the pluperfect, the device

employed was that of combining the present or past of the verb 'to have' with the passive participle. It is easy to see how this contrivance was suggested. If I say 'I have a letter written', where *have* is used in its primary sense, the sentence expresses the same fact as 'I have written a letter', though it expresses something else in addition, viz., that the letter is still in my possession. From being used in cases of this kind, the combination of *have* with a participle naturally came to serve as a mere compound tense, as in 'he has a man killed'. Here the participle agrees like an adjective with the object noun, but in later Old English it was made indeclinable. The practice of putting the object after the participle did not become general till the fourteenth century."

Now in Basic, as we have seen, all but three verbs as such are eliminated; we have only, in addition, the 15 operators. That is, we cannot say:

I have shut the door.

We have to say:

I have got the door shut.

Superficially it may seem that the introduction of 'got', besides making the sentence longer, only complicates what is already a sufficiently complex idea. But does it? Which form is closer to the historically earlier form? Bradley shows how the use of 'has' as an auxiliary grew naturally out of its use to denote possession. In

I have got the door

'have got' denotes possession; 'shut' is merely tacked on afterwards as an adjective. The fact that by tacking

it on we turn 'has' into an auxiliary is not important to the learner. What is important is that by practising continuously with 'has got' plus a participle-adjective he is practising with a language-pattern which will later greatly facilitate his use of the 'present-perfect' with the 'complete' English verbs. Just as in learning the Basic words (the *simplest* words) first he is following the same line of linguistic development as that of the English child; just as in learning the Basic words (the *Anglo-Saxon* words) first he is following the same line of linguistic development as that of the English vocabulary; so in practising with the Basic (*historically earlier*) constructions first he is following the same line of linguistic development as that of the English language as a whole. This is what we mean by qualitative simplification.

The conclusion thus reached is that the learning of English 'in the Basic Way' makes the *conscious* learning of grammar less necessary.

The next point is that if, despite the closer approximation to natural conditions made possible by Basic, the conditions are still so 'unnatural' as to make the teaching of *some* grammar necessary, then the use of Basic makes the whole business much simpler. How?

### Grammar Through Basic

In almost all the 'grammar and composition' books used in the middle and high departments of schools in India we find, somewhere, such an injunction to the teacher as the following: "Before a sentence as a whole is tackled the teacher must see that the pupil understands its content. . . . Only when all the ground has been prepared can the pupil be expected to tackle the grammatical

and syntactical points involved; and if his attention is distracted by a difficult word or phrase he is not likely to succeed."

That is, before the exercises are tackled the words have to be explained. The 'grammar and composition' lesson thus invariably starts off (or, under these conditions, *should* start off) as a *reading* lesson pure and simple.

That the pupils should have to learn new words straight from the printed page (instead of through conversation) is already in itself bad enough. That they should have to learn them as 'incidentals' in a 'grammar and composition' lesson is far worse. Because, after all, it *is* a 'grammar and composition' lesson. The teacher is naturally anxious to get down to the real business of the lesson; he has no time to explain the words fully; he has to be satisfied with a half-explanation, or a translation, which will later in all likelihood yield a full crop of mistakes in diction or idiom.

But if with Basic we can say all that we have to say about anything it follows that with Basic we can say all that we have to say about grammar. If we can define all terms we can define all grammatical terms. Therefore, we can have all our rules in Basic, all our examples in Basic, all our exercises in Basic. We can have a Basic grammar and composition book, for use in the preliminary stage, in which the pupil will not meet, *incidentally*, any word or idiom or construction that he does not know. With such a book there will be no need for a preliminary reading lesson, for hurried explanations, for half-digested meanings. The teacher will at once be able to get down to the real business of the lesson.

But will 'grammar and composition' lessons as such be needed? Are they desirable? Writers of manuals on the teaching of English grammar, both formal and functional, have long warned the teacher against the 'deductive method' (from rules to exercises), and advised him to use the inductive method (from mistakes to rules). The grammar book, they say, should be used as a handbook to which the erring pupil is referred for enlightenment, rather than as a text-book for consistent class study. And then follows the inevitable list of marking symbols. Again we are given advice which is sound in theory but useless in practice.

The use of the inductive method depends on two things. The first we have seen: that the pupil should be familiar with every word used in the book. The second is that the number of mistakes made by the class in general should be relatively few in number and mainly 'individual' in character. If all or most of the pupils are constantly making the same type of mistake (such as "he did not come yet") then obviously 'individual reference' (*i.e.* marking and recorection) will mean not a saving but a loss of time. With so much to do the inductive method, under *such* conditions, is not warranted.

But we have already established that in most schools these *are* the conditions under which grammar is taught. Whole classes, muddled as they have been by the word-counters, are in fact making the same type of mistake. And so insecure is the foundation, if any, laid in the primary school that whether grammar is taught in the high school deductively or inductively makes very little difference. The result is the same — failure, not always



in the examination sense but nearly always in the language-sense.

Now we cannot be altogether sure that the Basic Way scheme, because of the three advantages described above, will make the teaching of grammar *entirely* unnecessary. But we can be quite certain that the 'residue' of mistakes left over from the practice-period will be so small and variegated as to make the use of the individual inductive method not merely desirable but essential, not merely sound in theory but natural in practice. Under such conditions the teacher will not have to be told to use the inductive method. He will fall back on it as instinctively as the teacher in England uses it in marking a set of English compositions.

In any case I hope I have made it clear that the solution to the problem of 'bad grammar' does not lie in 'more grammar'. The High School Final Examiner evidently thinks this is the solution. Concluding his Report he says:

I feel that unless Grammar is seriously taught the average student-life in the University will still remain at seven years — or even longer.

My opinion is that if grammar is seriously taught on the present basis, or rather lack of basis, the average student-life will be not shorter but longer — and hardly more pleasant!

## CHAPTER 12

### GRAMMAR — FORMAL OR FUNCTIONAL ?

“ But our pupils must not only know their foreign languages unconsciously and mechanically; they must not only learn how to express themselves, but they must also know *why*.”

It is some such thought as this, I think, which is behind the demand for ‘grammar for grammar’s sake.’ Grammar is, after all, the science of language, and not all science is applied (functional). If children are taught ‘pure mathematics’, a subject which is of very little practical use to them in after-life, why should they not be taught ‘pure (formal) grammar’, even if the functional applications are already being unconsciously observed?

Now if the aim of pure grammar, or formal grammar, is to give the pupil an insight into the workings of language, no one will dispute its value. The objection to its teaching comes from those who realize that the subject is usually so mechanically taught that this aim is never achieved. As Dr. Jespersen says, “The object in most cases is merely to classify the sentences or words under certain given rubrics and to give their names and the respective rules which have been committed to memory, something which can in large part be done with very little grammatical understanding of the language in question.”

This is the great weakness of the traditional method of teaching pure grammar — that it degenerates almost always into sheer memory-work. It does not call upon

or develop the child's powers of observation and analysis; it does not relate what he is learning to his own thoughts and activities. To that extent it is opposed to two golden rules of teaching: "Never tell the pupil anything he can find out for himself" and "Never bother the pupil with anything he is incapable of finding out for himself."

So much for the current methods of teaching pure grammar. Now let us return for a moment to its aim. We want to give the child an insight into the workings of language. We want him to understand how men use words to communicate their thoughts to others. We want him to grasp that if everyone made his own rules communication would become impossible, just as if, on the football field, every player followed his own rules the game would become impossible.

What is the best way, then, of drawing attention to the rules, of revealing why they come into existence, why they take a particular form, why they are sometimes changed?

### The 'Income' Analogy

Perhaps I shall make my meaning clearer if I return to the 'income' analogy. What is the swiftest and surest way of drawing a man's attention to his expenditure budget? Ask him to think about it and he will probably say, "Why?" or "Next week." But take away the bulk of his income and he will soon be studying the items. Before he decides which to cross out and which to leave standing he must think about them all. Because he has to make the *balance* of his cash go so much further, he will be forced to examine

more carefully what he was doing *with the part which has been taken away*.

In the same way teachers who want their pupils to think about the words they are using and the way in which they use them are realizing the futility of merely asking them to 'think' or giving them lists to 'remember'. They are groping their way to a realisation that the best method of making the child 'sit up and take notice' is to 'take away', on occasion, the great majority of the words and some of the constructions he uses, and so *force* him to examine what he has been doing with them. But how can the teacher decide which words and which constructions can be most usefully 'taken away' and which should remain? Sooner or later he finds that the decision has been made for him by the inventors of Basic, not in any arbitrary way but on the basis of principles which are best calculated to serve the very purposes he has in mind. Here, for example, is a teacher in America describing to a conference of American educationists his first experiments with Basic in a class of American children.

"With this situation (described above) in mind I have been casting about, like many other teachers, for teaching material and a technique which would be better calculated to give my pupils a grasp of language and its workings than the traditional approach through formal grammar and rhetoric seems to have been.... And in my search for instruments I came upon Basic.... The class I am teaching is by no means as yet expert in using Basic. But I have found in the meantime that the *process of learning* it is in itself of sufficient value to justify the time spent on it. From the very beginning the study of Basic brings out, in a way which was to me a

revelation, the fundamental points about the workings of language.

"In the first study of the Basic list the class noticed that one category in the division of General Things is made up of materials — butter, paint, oil, wax, etc. In ordinary English these words are, of course, often used as verbs, and the question of the relationship between the Basic name and the English verb arose early. In other words, how should the verbs *to butter*, *to paint*, etc. be put into Basic? It is quite a simple exercise. *To butter* becomes in Basic *to put butter on*; *to paint*, *to put paint on*; *to oil* something or *to wax* it is *to put oil or wax on or over it*. Could we, then, make a general rule about the translation of such material verbs into Basic? Do they always mean *to put the material on*? Apparently. But then a boy discovered in the Basic general list the word *dust*. If I dust a table, do I *put dust on it*? Why does *to butter* mean *to put butter on*, and *to dust* mean *to take dust off*? Well, of course, the reason is quite obvious even to a boy. There is no arbitrary, prefabricated rule about it. Each verb gets its meaning from the everyday human action. We put butter on bread every day. We take dust off tables once a week or once a month. We don't, as a rule, take butter off bread or put dust on tables.

## Context

"At this point, if you are at all like my Basic class, you will want to point out to me that *to dust* can sometimes mean *to put dust on*. That is exactly the objection that a boy will raise and it is exactly the point that the teacher is waiting for. I happen to live in an apple country and the whine of the

dusting machines is a familiar sound to us on a hot June night. The farmer is dusting his trees. Is he taking dust off them? Hardly. It appears, then, that *to dust a table* means *to take dust off* it, but that *to dust a tree* means *to put dust on* it. A word can apparently mean anything we need to have it mean. And thus the idea of language being intimately connected with man's living actions and experiences, of its being simply one of the instruments he shapes to his use to meet his needs in the world, begins to take root.

"But if *dust* can have two meanings, how can we tell which meaning it has? Why, simply by noticing whether it is a tree or a table which is being dusted; by the situation in which it is used; in other words, in its context.

"So here is another fundamental idea about language taking root: the idea that it is the whole context that gives the word its meaning, and that the context is not simply words printed on a page, but situations, actions, things, people, realities.

"In this same exercise one other question was raised. Suppose you and I each own an elephant, and that neither of us knows anything about any elephant except his own. Now suppose that your elephant is always getting himself much too dusty for your taste in elephants; so that when you dust an elephant you mean you take dust off him; and that mine has fleas that yield only to Black Flag; so that when I dust my elephant I put dust on to him. Now I pay you a visit; and the very first morning, you ask me if I would mind dusting your elephant. 'Not at all,' I reply cheerily, 'where's the dust?' 'Where would it be?' you retort. 'It's on the elephant, of course, and if you don't want to dust

him, why don't you just say so instead of trying to be funny?' At this point, if you were a country, you would probably begin to build a bigger navy!

"What has happened? A discussion of such a simple problem soon brings out another idea about language: that successful communication depends upon some overlapping of experience. The experience may be actual, with elephants; or it may be partly verbal.

"So, in an analysis of half a dozen words in the Basic list, three general principles of language, all of them central to the problem of interpretation and communication, can be simply and naturally worked out, stated, and illustrated.

"It is the same with the other elements of language. Very early, while the class is still studying the Basic list and its workings and making its first hesitant attempts to use it, the question will come up, 'May we use metaphor?' A discussion of that question has done more to set straight for that class the whole idea of metaphor than anything I have ever before discovered. For it at once becomes clear that without the use of metaphor Basic could express only the physical movements of things in space. From this a boy goes by easy stages to the notion that much of what is said in ordinary discourse cannot be said without metaphor, and to some understanding of the metaphorical basis of all language. Metaphor, at last, ceases to be a mystic ornament and comes into its own as the creative element of everyday language."

These, of course, are very general considerations about language which are not, unfortunately, considered worthy of inclusion in the 'pure grammar' course. But the same principles apply to the commoner points. In

analysing the reasons why the small Basic list is able to do so much work the pupils will discover, as they discovered the use of metaphor, things such as the following:

1. The difference between verb, operator and auxiliary. The analytical tendency in verb formation (*e.g.* enter = go in)
2. The analytical tendency in the formation of tenses etc. *e.g.*, if I *had been talking* (cf. French — si je *parlerais*)
3. The distinction between 'shall' and 'will', between 'was' and 'were' (subjunctive), between 'the' specific and 'the' generic etc.
4. The English facility for interchanging parts of speech (a *moving* train) and forming compounds (collar-button).
5. The reduction of abstract nouns (fictions) to concrete terms, etc, etc.

Such a training would not be as systematic as the rules given in textbooks but it would be far more valuable.

Speaking about 'grammar for use' I said that for the Indian child the distinction between formal and functional grammar is unimportant; *if* he learns grammar at all it must be both. Suppose we assume that the Basic preparation does in fact make the teaching of grammar for use unnecessary, but in spite of that we still think it desirable that the child should learn grammar for its own sake. Even then, I maintain, the two still cannot be dissociated. Because the best way of teaching grammar is the way I have described, and fundamentally it is nothing but a *formal* tabulation of the results of *functional* analysis.



## CHAPTER 13

### READING — AMUSEMENT OR INSTRUCTION ?

Having dealt with the various aspects of method in the introductory stage we come now to the question of material. We know now what sort of *word-material* ought to be used, but words can be read only in books. What sort of *reading material* is most suitable for the Indian child?

Talking about the present confusion of aim in the teaching of English (page 19) I said the result was that the pupil leaves school unable, on the one hand, to speak or write English properly; unwilling, on the other, to read it. Failing to 'strike a balance' between the claims of 'shop' and 'Shakespeare' educationists have fallen back on an uneasy compromise which leaves the pupil master of neither. Indeed it can hardly be called a compromise. Certainly there is nothing compromising about the terrific grind that literary English imposes on the unprepared high school student. Look at his class text. Look at the number of words underlined. Look at the margins thickly scored with 'notes' and 'meanings'. Every paragraph, it is clear, has meant half-an-hour's toil. Is it any wonder that the last day of school should see the book flung into a corner with a "Thank God, no more of that!"

And not only the literary text, but even the ordinary school reader. Look, for example, at this paragraph, taken from a "Junior Reader" in use in some of the middle classes of Indian schools (Ballard's *Fundamental English Course*, Book 4, Page 70).

Every London boy knows what conkers are. Henry certainly did. In fact, he looked upon himself as an authority on them. It is certain he knew a *great deal* about the *game of conkers*. There was only one boy in his class who could *beat him at it*, and that was William Jones. But then William could beat everybody else too. Indeed, so good was he at the game of conkers that Henry had once called him William the Conqueror, and the *nickname* had *stuck* to him. (The italics are ours).

It looks easy. For the London boy it *is* easy — and interesting, because he himself (as William or Henry) is the hero of the story. But for the Indian boy (*and* girl) who has never played conkers, never even seen a conker? Think of the laborious explanation required before the teacher can even start on ‘a great deal’, ‘beat — at’, ‘nickname’ and, in the next paragraph, ‘miss an opportunity’, ‘incur the wrath of’, ‘at any rate’ and so on.

Is it worth it? Is not the work involved out of all proportion with the importance of the subject? It may be a ‘fundamental’ way of teaching the English boy “1066 and all That.” But for the Indian child learning English as a second language it is neither ‘fundamental’ nor funny; it is all so abstract, so confusing, so difficult to grasp, that he might well be forgiven if he ends up by believing that William and Harold decided the fate of England by battling with conkers!

For the Indian child, that is to say, this sort of thing is neither easy nor interesting. It will not encourage him to ‘read’ in the widest sense of the word, to find out how the nations feed, clothe and

govern themselves, how the world of to-day differs from the world of yesterday, how the world of to-morrow will differ from the world of to-day. He will not be encouraged to read how other nations achieved greatness, so that he may try to make *his* country great.

And these, above all, are the things he should be encouraged to read about. As Champion says,

We argue that the pupil should learn to read as an adult reads, silently and for information, but we have so far generally failed to provide him with information worth reading about. We condemn the paucity of general knowledge possessed by the average pupil, but we do nothing to secure that he reads books of general knowledge. We do not realise that it is by means of reading that the pupil, like the adult, obtains the larger share of his information. Books of stories, which are the type of book generally supplied for non-detailed reading, may give pleasure, but they yield little intellectual profit.

It needs to be more clearly recognized that the pupil should read not only as an adult reads; he should read the kind of information that an educated adult reads or should read — books of general knowledge, popular science, geography, history, economics, etc. simplified to the intellectual level of secondary school pupils. If only the habit of reading such books could be inculcated in our pupils, the cultural effects would be appreciable.

And again,

We shall have to get away from the conception that reading means only the reading of stories. These have their place as entertainment and amusement, and no one would seek to abolish them from the pupil's reading. If we conceive

of reading as serious reading<sup>1</sup>, and the school as a place for serious reading, books of knowledge will be read in the schools and books of stories at home.

But, you may ask, why should the Indian child be made to read geography, history, economics etc. in English? Why not in his own language?

There's the rub — he cannot; there are no books. Nothing in the Campbell Committee Report is more striking than the analysis of "publications in Burmese registered during the past 21 years" (page 262).

"The scarcity of suitable books," says the Report, "is one of the major obstacles to the development of Vernacular education. We teach children to read and send them into an environment where there is practically nothing to read."

Is it not extraordinary that in all these years peoples so intelligent, so innately civilized, as those of India should not have remedied this deficiency? Not if we remember that all these years the schools have been turning out future teachers too embittered by its difficulties to read English seriously and with very little to read in their own language.

That, it seems to me, is the tragedy of Indian education. It is a vicious circle: the necessity for English holds back the development of the vernacular; the teaching of English fails to provide an intelligentsia capable of developing the vernacular. "If," says the Campbell Report, "the teaching of English.....is placed on sound and efficient lines, future generations of teachers will have a competent knowledge of English and will be able to draw on English books to make good the deficiencies of books in Burmese."

“On sound and efficient lines!” These, as we have seen (page 53), the Committee believes to be provided by the *New Method System* and the *Faucett System*, in addition to Basic English. The question we now have to ask is: Will either of these two systems succeed in creating a ‘reading habit’ where others have failed? We have already examined these systems from the point of view of *method*. But, apart from the difficulties of teaching, what have they to offer in the way of *reading*? What is the length and nature of their BC line?

Before we seek to answer these questions let us look more closely at this problem of reading. Usually it takes the form of ‘Which kind of reading is more important, intensive or extensive, detailed or non-detailed, reading aloud or silent reading, reading for sound or reading for thought?’

### Sound or Thought?

The very fact that such questions are asked betrays a confusion of aim almost staggering in its implications. How do most people read, once they have left school? Not one in a thousand ever has occasion to read aloud. Nearly everyone reads, if he reads at all, silently; nearly everyone reads for thought. It is reading for thought, for ideas, not reading aloud, which is the mainspring of progress, both cultural and commercial. The child *must* be taught to read silently, as adults do; he *must* learn how to extract from a book the maximum of thought in a minimum of time.

Here again we find it is difficulty of method which has so perversely made silent reading supplementary, or

subsidiary, or subordinate, to the detailed or intensive reading lesson itself, when in reality it is, or should be, the thing which above all we are aiming at. And the difficulty is one which takes us right back to the opening argument of this exposition, the difficulty of finding books "the material of which is up to the mental age of the pupils, and the language and vocabulary of which offer no difficulty to the pupils." We agree that the pupil should learn to read independently of the teacher; we agree that he should learn to read not merely stories but books of knowledge, history, geography, travel, biography, economics — as the adult does. "But where," asks the harassed teacher, "are we to find such books? We cannot waste time on childish subject-matter; the child will not bother to read more difficult books on his own; we must read them in class, and if there are difficulties we must deal with them in class — intensively." Hence the distortion of aim.

Let us now return to the *New Method* and *Oxford English Courses*. What solution do they offer to this problem? The first thing we note is that they too, both in name and in fact, reduce the status of silent reading to 'extra reading' or 'supplementary reading'. They publish 'readers' to serve the same purpose as the books which may be called an end in themselves; they are 'supplementary readers', designed as an adjunct to the reading lesson. This may sound mere quibbling over words, but any one who makes a study, for example, of the *New Method* 'supplementary readers', and of their place in the *New Method* scheme, will see that it not mere quibbling, but the stressing of a vital distinction.

### 'Supplementary' Readers

In the first place the *New Method* and *Oxford Course* supplementary readers are not, like the Basic books, based on one 'minimum vocabulary' containing all the words necessary for self-expression; they are based on a number of different vocabularies each one of which is merely part of a larger vocabulary. Thus the *New Method* has supplementary readers based on 222 words, 458 words, 773 words, 1084 words, 1427 words and 1929 words. The Oxford readers go up in steps of 500, i.e. 500, 1000, 1500, 2000, 2500.

Secondly each level is provided not with a large and potentially unlimited number of books, as is Basic, but with a very small and limited number of books. The *New Method* course might thus be represented as in Figure 31 (overleaf).

This is the scheme; but in schools where these systems are in use one finds that more often than not the steps are dispensed with, and the line is flattened out to one straight slope from A to M. The fact is that the supplementary readers are not read; few teachers bother about them, because the subject-matter cannot as a rule be regarded as an end in itself.

If they *had* been suitable Champion would not have had occasion to write :

Ideally books prescribed for extensive reading should not contain one unfamiliar word, phrase, or language-form. There should be no language-barrier between the pupil and what he reads. The pupil would read such books independently of the teacher and he would read them with pleasure and with a sense of achievement. Actually such books are *not* available.

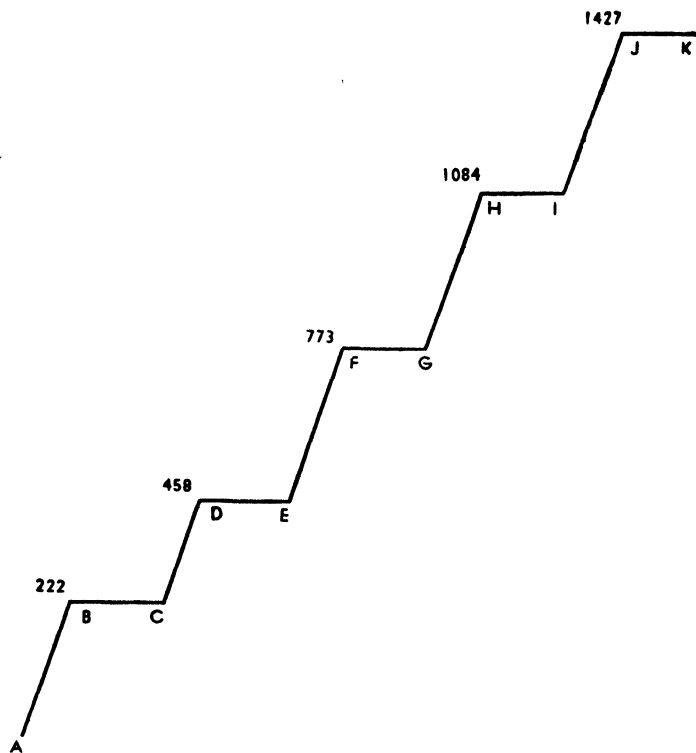


Figure 31. New Method Reading

That was written in 1933, *before* the publication of the Basic books. Since then such books as he describes, serious but at the same time simple, *have* become available.

There are Basic books too, for children, whose subject-matter is childish. But there are also many other books which deal with subjects as important and as profound as any which are normally discussed in a vocabu-



lary of 30,000 words — art, religion, politics, philosophy, everything. It must never be forgotten that Basic English, though we have been considering it mainly as an introduction to normal English, is a complete language in itself, and is being used as such, for international and scientific purposes, by adults who have not the time for further study and for adults who cannot be relied upon to have a more extensive knowledge of English (See Chapter 18).

### The Reading Habit

Thus there are not only the *Basic Reading Books* which are designed for the transition from the AB learning stage to the BC one-level practice period; there are not only the story books like *The Trader of Venice* (for home reading); there are not only the simple knowledge books, like *Wires Round the Earth* and *To Far Cathay* (for intensive class study); there are also books like *The Meno of Plato* (philosophy), *International Talks* (politics) *Twentieth-Century Houses* (architecture), *The Basic Bible* and *African Beliefs* (religion), *Rules of Reason* (logic), *Arms and the Man* (drama), and books on astronomy, geology, chemistry, economics etc. — all in the 850 words of Basic English.

Even the *Basic Reading Books*, written for children of 8, 9 and 10, get away from the “Jack the Giant Killer” and “Puss in Boots” type of bed-time story and instead give descriptions of common events seen in an interesting light. The third book takes the child on to simple questions of general knowledge. Starting with the things that men do it goes on to give an account of the life of plants and animals and the earth itself. The books in “Our Changing Times” Series are a guide to

the inventions which have revolutionised life in modern times, to the discoveries which have made the world so much smaller than it was a hundred years ago, and to the sciences by which the organisation of society and the arts of peace have been made possible.

Thus because of its simplicity Basic has solved this problem of reading as decisively as it has solved the allied problems of method, grammar and pronunciation. No Basic book, however abstruse its subject may be, contains a single "word, phrase or language-form" which is unfamiliar to a pupil of the *Basic Way Books 1 — 4*. The choice of books for any particular class depends entirely on the 'mind-age', not the 'word-age', of the pupils in it. If the books are carefully chosen for subject-matter the pupil can read them on his own and he can read them "with pleasure and with a sense of achievement." He can, that is to say, acquire a reading habit that will remain with him for life.

Almost every Indian teacher with whom one discusses school problems comes back in the end to the 'problem of the parent'. The parents are not interested in education; they do not help or encourage their children; they do not co-operate with the teacher. This is the common cry. It is not surprising to hear that parents who do not read do not encourage their children to read. It is nearly always true that an uneducated, (*i.e.*, non-reading) parent will mean an uneducated family. This is another vicious circle which only the Basic wedge can break through.

It will thus be seen that Basic is not merely important as a new technique of English teaching; it is vital to the progress of India and of all countries which are struggling to break through the linguistic 'vicious

circle'. For if Basic does in fact succeed in producing a generation of truly educated parents, parents who read, the cultural effects will be enormous. And so because, in the last analysis, the political development of a people depends entirely on its education and culture, Basic may be regarded as a stepping-stone not only to the English language but also to political progress.

## CHAPTER 14

### READING — WORD-MAGIC OR WORD-CONTROL ?

We come now to the problem of reading in the higher stages. In Chapter 3 I tried to show that one of the chief merits of Basic English as a foundation is that the words it employs are 'fundamental'. One quality of such 'fundamental' words is that, in the development of the language, they always retain their original meaning. They may be used in new senses, new combinations, and these new senses and combinations may, in the course of time, become part of the language, but the words themselves always retain their original sense. 'Take', for example, is always 'take', though it may find itself new companions — 'take cover'. 'Keep' is always 'keep'; 'clean' is always 'clean'; 'green' is always 'green'. Such words are like the roots of a tree. Many things may happen to the tree: the leaves come and go, branches die and fall off, others take their place; but the roots always remain firmly planted in the ground.

So it is with language; anything, almost, may happen to the complex words; the root-words remain unchanged. Look, for example, at a word like 'sterilize'. Hitherto we have known it and used it only in the sense of 'make clean' or 'keep clean'. We have thought of it in connection with milk, hospitals, disinfectants and feeding-bottles. Now somebody starts an agitation for a "Sterilization of Open Spaces Bill", with the object of preserving London's open spaces

from the depredation of the jerry-builder, that is, with the object of keeping London not so much *clean* as *green*.

Or, another example, the word 'transpire'. In a certain lawsuit, let us say, the accused is the wife of one of the witnesses. Nobody knows it until the witness inadvertently gives himself away. The reporters will write: 'It transpired that etc.' That *was* the original meaning of 'transpire'. But now, through ignorance and carelessness, it has come to be used merely in the sense of 'take place', and even eminent counsel may be heard to ask, "What transpired (took place) after twelve o'clock?"

I have given only two examples of how complex words take on new senses. Readers who are interested will find hundreds more in A. P. Herbert's *What a Word!* I am not concerned here, as is Mr. Herbert in his book, with the question of purity. I am concerned only to show that such changes are in fact always taking place, and to explain, as briefly as possible, why they take place.

## Why Words Change

The fundamental reason for linguistic change is, of course, the same as that for any other sort of change. It is man's everlasting dissatisfaction with *things as they are*. Behind all invention is this urge to 'improve', to make a machine produce more, or go faster, or make less noise. Change is the first law of life, and this applies as much to language as to lenses. Language is not static; it is dynamic, always in a state of flux. If changing conditions create a need for a new word, or for a new sense in an old word, that new

word or new sense is created, and passes into the language.

But together with this general urge to change, controlling and directing it, is another urge — to change things in the way we, as individuals, want them to be changed. Every man who thinks and feels is a propagandist at heart, and even though he may not himself engage in active propaganda for this or that reform, there are things he would like to be changed to his way of thinking. And in language he finds not only an instrument of communication with others but also a powerful weapon for the persuasion of others. How? Because if a word is repeated often enough in a certain sense it can be invested with that sense and always thereafter it will be read in that sense. Why, for example, did the would-be preservers of London's open spaces choose 'sterilization' for their banner and not 'preservation'? Because 'sterilization' has a suggestion, not contained in 'preservation', of spotless cleanliness, bareness, hygiene, freedom from disease, etc. It was more calculated to carry conviction, to influence others. So, in a moment of happy inspiration, it was adopted.

For the same reason temperance societies, who aim at prohibition, never talk about the 'wine-trade'; they talk about the Liquor Traffic, which *sounds* much more pernicious and disgusting, and if they go on talking about the Liquor Traffic long enough many people who are themselves not averse to a glass of wine will come to have a feeling of guilt whenever they take one. They are supporting the Liquor Traffic! From that to prohibition is only a **step**.

As we saw in Chapter 3 there are many words which not only point to a person or thing but at the same time indicate the speaker's attitude to that person or thing, and if that word is repeated often enough by a sufficient number of people the 'attitude' will become inseparable from the 'pointer'. We gave the example of one and the same child, who, not having a very high opinion of himself, is called 'modest' by some (implying praise), and 'diffident' by others (implying censure or contempt). Thus among practising Christians, who regard humility as a virtue, 'humility' would be synonymous with 'modesty', while to a savage tribe it would be synonymous with 'timidity'. And the first task of the Christian seeking to convert the savage tribe would be to change the attitude-suggestion in 'humility' from one of 'timidity' to one of 'modesty'.

Thus in order to be able to read intelligently it is essential to be able to separate, in all such words as 'modest' and 'humble', the fact element (low opinion) from the feeling element (praise, censure), the pointing element from the personal element, the statement element from the suggestion element. A training in this kind of separation is essential because unless we have it we cannot guard ourselves against the word-magic (literary hypnotism) which exploits the suggestiveness of certain words to convey a certain impression.

I am not arguing here for or against prohibition, for or against the preservation of open spaces. What I am arguing for is a technique which will teach Burmese students how, in reading their newspaper or a book, to dissociate the propaganda in words from the facts in words.

'Dictator', for example, is another word that is constantly being flung about these days. In America the anti-Roosevelt Press (most of the Press is anti-Roosevelt) has labelled the President a Dictator, and every day millions of Americans are being induced to think of him, by the power of suggestion, in terms of a Hitler or a Mussolini, that is, as 'a man who has taken away by force all power in government from other men'.

But if you analyse any of the numerous leaders which have been written to denounce Roosevelt as a dictator, and, having eliminated the suggestion element, seek to define the factual implications of the word as used, you will find yourself left with no more than 'a man to whom most of the men in the country have given by law powers in government greater than those other rulers in that country have had'. The writer wants Americans to think of him as a Hitler, and the Hitler definition is the only one which will make his conclusions right. Calling him a dictator is simply a way of suggesting a comparison with Hitler, whom the writer is sure Americans do not like. He simply wants Americans to dislike Roosevelt!

## Reading and Understanding

This is just one example of the word-magic practised by journalists and politicians to get people to do what they want. Word-magic is not always political; and it is not always consciously practised. But almost every book and newspaper contains examples of it; and it flourishes because most readers have not learnt how to read. They have learnt to read words, but they have not learnt how to ask themselves whether or not they have understood the meaning of those words, and



whether or not the words do mean exactly what the writer wishes to convey. They have not learnt how to 'debunk' high-sounding phrases so as to get at the thought, or the twisting of thought, or the poverty of thought, or the confusion of thought, which such phrases sometimes clothe. They have not, that is to say, learnt the art of understanding.

This uncritical swallowing of phrases, for such it may be called, is not confined to the semi-educated masses. After a series of tests at Harvard and Cambridge Dr. I. A. Richards came to the conclusion that no less than ninety-six per cent of the undergraduates at these universities had not learnt how to read. In all some 200 students submitted to the test. To these he gave six lines from an article in the *New Republic* containing a number of ambiguities, and asked for their interpretation. Only six were able to reveal the confusion of thought. The rest had 'nothing to say'.

But if teachers, as it appears, have failed to teach understanding it has not, been for want of trying. Rather has it been for want of an instrument, a suitable technique for the testing of understanding. What are the ways in which teachers test understanding?

## Paraphrase

Most common of all is the way of paraphrase. "Are you sure you understand this? Give it to me in your own words." Now let us see what happens when the student "gives it in his own words." We will take the first two sentences of the 'test-paragraph' used by Dr. Richards. They go like this:

In brief, the educational significance of modern social developments is to emphasize the need for

a liberated intelligence. This in turn requires a reorganization of educational agencies so that theory may operate freely on the level of practice.

The student is asked to convey the thought of these two sentences, substituting, wherever possible, his own words for the words of the original. For some words he can find no substitutes (*e.g.* 'educational', 'intelligence') and the teacher, recognizing the difficulty, tacitly accepts their retention in the paraphrase. So the paraphrase may read something like this (the changes are *italicised*):

In *short*, the educational *meaning* of *recent* developments *in society* is to *stress* the necessity for a *freed* intelligence. This in turn *demand*s a *fresh organization* of educational *machinery*, so that theory may work freely on the level of practice.

And the teacher lets it go at that.

Another method is translation from and into a foreign language. It is not a method consciously adopted, but one of the arguments commonly put forward in favour of translation exercises is that they inculcate a finer sense of word-values and meanings. Let us suppose this is such an exercise, and the student is asked to translate it into French. In French it reads:

En résumé, la portée instructive dans les développements sociaux de notre époque, c'est d'appuyer sur le besoin d'une intelligence libérée. Ceci, à son tour, demande la réorganisation des moyens d'instruction de telle façon que la théorie puisse opérer librement, d'accord avec la pratique.

The translation is accepted, as the paraphrase was accepted, and the lesson goes on. Neither method (if translation can be called a method) has revealed the ambiguities of the original. Take, for example, the word 'significance'. The French reveals only the student's knowledge that the French word for 'significance' is 'portée'. The paraphrase reveals only, to the initiated, that *neither teacher nor taught* has understood the significance of 'significance' as used in this context.

How do we know that? Let's work it out. Another word for 'meaning' is 'sense'. Could we replace 'meaning' by 'sense' and say: 'the *sense* of modern social developments is to emphasize etc.'? Obviously not. Then 'meaning' cannot be right. What, according to the writer, has 'emphasized the need for' etc.? We have two factors—'education' and 'modern social developments'. Neither can be used by itself as the subject of 'is to emphasize'. They are bound up together. What then is the relationship between them? *We cannot say*. It may be •

the effects of education on modern developments  
are to emphasize etc.

Or it may be

the effects of modern developments on education  
are to emphasize etc.

Obviously there is a world of difference, but the writer has used the word 'significance' so loosely that we cannot know what he has in mind.

Now look at the word 'emphasize'. The paraphraser gives 'stress'. But what does 'stress the need' mean? It may mean 'makes the need *clearer*' or it may

mean 'makes the need *greater*'. Is there any difference between

There is clearly a need for.....  
and

There is a greater (than ever before) need for...?  
Clearly there is, but putting 'stress' for 'emphasize' does not reveal it.

In the same way 'this in turn *demand*s' for 'this in turn *requires*' entirely overlooks the difficulty of knowing what exactly the 'this' refers to. Is it the 'need' that 'requires'? Or is it the 'liberated intelligence' that 'requires'? Or, in other words,

Is reorganization a demand of the intelligence  
*when* liberated, or

Is reorganization necessary *before* the intelligence  
*can be* liberated?

The ambiguity must be admitted, but what, it may be asked, has all this to do with Basic English? Simply this: if, instead of saying to the student, "Give this in your own words," the teacher had said, "Give this in Basic," there would have been quite a different story to tell.

## Basic Analysis

In the first place neither 'significance' nor 'meaning' has a place in the Basic list. The only possibly related word is 'sense'. But the student would immediately have realized that 'sense' used in this context makes *nonsense*. He would have been forced to cast about for some other substitute, and the only possible substitute would be 'effects'. That would have given him 'the educational effects of modern social develop-

ments', still leaving the ambiguity of the 'of' as in the original. But Basic does not permit 'educational', only 'education'. The student cannot say 'education effects'; he has therefore to reconstruct the sentence, and, in reconstructing the sentence, he is forced to define the relationship between 'education' and 'developments'. It is then that he realizes that he cannot give one definition; there are two alternatives. In the same way the other ambiguities are forced upon him and he writes:

To put it shortly, the effects of

Either (1) education on developments in society

Or (2) developments in society on education  
make clearer (greater) the need for minds which  
are free (which have been made free).

Either (1) Such minds we will not get without  
a new organization of the ways  
(instruments, workers) in education,  
by which theory may be put  
into use (may become a guide to  
our acts) without trouble (being  
stopped, waste).

Or (2) The desire of the free mind is for  
a new organization etc.

This illustration is used by Dr. Richards to show the peculiar *resolving power* of Basic — applied to a confused utterance. "It does not so much reproduce any one meaning as offer us a selection of possible ingredients in the meaning."

But, it may be objected, why put the student to the trouble of learning Basic English? Why not say to him, "Give me this in simple (simpler) language?" If we do that we start out, at the very beginning, with a need for definition. What is simple language? We may or may not agree that 'meaning' is simpler than

'significance', and that 'stress' is simpler than 'emphasize'. But either way it does not take us very far. Basic not only provides all the words needed for paraphrase in any subject; it also provides a *standard of simplicity* which prevents the substitution of one vaguely-understood word for another vaguely-understood word. It forces the student to think in definitions, and this in turn forces him to analyse and *break down* the thought of what he is reading into its elements — or rather, if there are ambiguities, into all its *possible* elements. Translation into Basic is not, as paraphrase so often is, merely an exercise in reproduction; it is an exercise in thought-analysis, and therefore in the use of 'complete' English.

I am not suggesting that the student should be forced to translate everything that he reads into Basic English, even if time could be found for such a procedure. What I am suggesting is that if the student is required to do it sufficiently often, with passages that seem to require it most, he will in time acquire a habit of Basic thought-analysis which will operate automatically *whenever there is need for it*. That is, he will at last have learnt how to read intelligently.

I emphasize *whenever there is need for it*, because obviously not all kinds of prose call for its use to the same extent, or for its exercise in the same way. There is clearly a distinction to be drawn between descriptive or narrative prose dealing with concrete things and events, and expository or argumentative prose dealing with semi-abstract subjects. It is in the fields of exposition and argument that Basic translation exercises are most useful — and most necessary. Basic has

its uses in the field of poetry but they are of a different order, and require separate treatment.

### The Learning of Basic

First, however, I want to go back for a moment to the 'trouble' of learning Basic English. Is the value of such a standard of simplicity as Basic provides so great as to make the learning of it worth-while? Is the trouble justified? The answer to that clearly depends on the amount of trouble involved.

To the Indian child who has used Basic as a first step it will mean no trouble at all; once he has learnt it as an introduction he can always go back to it, or be taken back to it, for purposes of analysis. This is an additional argument, and a very strong argument, in favour of Basic as a first step. Very soon after the learner has begun to 'expand' he can be taught how to put simple material back into Basic, and thereafter he can be forced to go back to Basic whenever the use of words in wrong senses, or a wrong interpretation of reading material, indicates that language is outrunning thought. Periodically throughout the school course he should be made to translate from 'complete' English into Basic; partly because the exercise is useful in itself, partly because it will save him the bother of having to relearn Basic when he comes to the kind of expository prose which demands such an analytical technique.

But what about the pupil who has not used Basic as a first step to English, and who now, in the high-school or the university, is asked to learn it as a first step to correct interpretation? How should he learn it? How long will it take him?

One day with the word-list and *The ABC of Basic English* (written in Basic) should give him some idea of the restrictions. Thereafter it is only a matter of translation (or composition) and correction by someone who has mastered the system. The rate of progress will naturally depend on how much English the learner knows, on his linguistic aptitude, the intensivity of study, the amount of exercise and the skill of the teacher. But normally, once the principles have been grasped, it should not take more than a week (one hour a day) to eliminate the grosser transgressions, and another week to master the finer points.

That does not mean that anyone who works on Basic for a fortnight is certain to write good Basic at the end of it, any more than ten years' schooling is certain to make everyone a writer. Some people think that because Basic is so restricted there can be only one way of saying anything one wishes to say. Actually there are always alternative ways, even in Basic, and the choice of the right one depends as much on the writer's 'flair' for writing as it does in normal writing. Just as there is good English and bad English, so there can be good Basic and bad Basic. However, the student, as distinct from the author, is not called upon to write stylistically perfect Basic. His main object is not to gain a command of Basic but through it to get a better command of 'complete' English.

But would a month or even a year be too high a price to pay for the art of intelligent reading? If one thinks of the amount of time wasted in reading which is not adequately understood, and of the amount of drivel which passes for thought *because* it is not adequately understood, no price can seem too high. Espe-



cially if it is remembered that the return is not deferred until *after* Basic has been learnt. As I have already shown (Chapter 12) from the very beginning the study of Basic gives an insight into the workings of language which is an education in itself, and teachers in England and America, no less than in China and Japan, are beginning to grasp that the process of learning Basic is in itself of sufficient value to the pupil to justify the time spent on it.

This argument takes on an added force when we come, in the next chapter, to consider the question of 'composition'.

## CHAPTER 15

### COMPOSITION — LICENCE OR LIBERTY?

Composition may be regarded as the 'other-side' of reading. If a student has not learnt to detect the fallacies, absurdities, falsities, ambiguities, illogicalities and extravagances in the writing of others he will certainly not be able to keep them out of his own. I have shown how the one-level practice period can ensure fluency and grammatical accuracy, in *writing* as well as in speaking, in the introductory stage. I now have to show how a periodic return to Basic in the upper forms can ensure that language does not outrun thought in the higher stages.

The problem of developing a terse, logical, well-knit style, like the problem of teaching pure grammar, is not confined to schools in foreign countries. It is just as much a problem to the English teacher in England and America, and to emphasize this I want to return for a moment to the teacher who was describing his experiences with Basic in the grammar lesson. Turning to the value of translation into Basic he says:

"Very early, in fact almost immediately, translations into Basic can be begun. Translation, I believe, will prove to be its most productive use. In the first place, a class soon learns that a Basic translation cannot be made a word at a time. The whole sentence must be taken together as the unit of thought and meaning. This in itself is a useful thing for a boy to know at first hand. Any boy who has worked in Basic translation will never again have to have explained to

him the fact that one language cannot be translated word for word by another, and the fact that the meaning of a passage of prose or poetry cannot be got at by piecing together the dictionary definitions of the words that make it up, or by producing a synonym-by-synonym paraphrase.

“Growing out of translation, there is another use for Basic which I am sure will prove to have great educational possibilities. Much of the work done in schools to-day in language is in danger of defeating its own ends by producing boys who know so many words and so many fetching ways of putting them together that the fundamental connection between words and realities has been all but lost. It is, unfortunately, precisely the potentially good writers, readers, and speakers who acquire this ready facility with words, a facility which leads anybody to believe that he has said something and knows what he has said, when both these comforting beliefs are demonstrably false.

### ‘Purple Patches’

“Basic is likely to prove a powerful antidote to this poison. In fact, one of my chief reasons for teaching Basic to a ninth grade boy is this: I want to be able to turn his own writing back to him whenever necessary during the next two or three years, and to say to him, ‘Now put this into Basic’. I believe that this will more surely clarify and give reality to his thinking and writing than any other method I have ever heard about. It is my belief, furthermore, that if this method were applied consistently in English and other courses, a boy would acquire habits of straight

thinking and straightforward writing which would become his permanent possession.

"I do not mean that he would write always, or even often, in Basic; but that the occasional discipline of turning his own lividly purple passages into Basic would give him a respect for words and a knowledge of the way they work that would reflect upon all his thinking and writing. A boy thoroughly trained in Basic should become constitutionally unable to fool himself into writing fine-sounding nonsense. Even if this were the only result to be expected from a boy's having learned Basic, I should myself be willing to gamble the amount of class time necessary for him to learn it."

I have quoted this teacher at some length in order to emphasize that the value of Basic is not limited to its use as a first step to English in foreign countries.

The features that make it the only rational introduction — self-sufficiency, simplicity, stability — also make it the only logical discipline, the only scientific control, for people who are trying to write English *anywhere*.

## Journalese

Anyone who by chance should happen to get hold of a London *Times* office style-book, issued for the instruction and guidance of that journal's reporters, sub-editors, contributors and correspondents, will find somewhere in its pages a plea for simplicity, brevity, concreteness. The author quotes, as an example of the sort of thing to be avoided, the following example of wordy writing:

With regard to the discussion which took place at yesterday's meeting with reference to the

position arising out of the present situation the result, so far as the practical point of view is concerned, was of a purely negative character.

All this, he adds, could have been reduced to five simple words:—

Nothing came of yesterday's discussion.

One can be reasonably certain that the author of the London *Times* style-book had never studied Basic English. And yet quite unconsciously, in seeking a simpler phraseology, he made use of five Basic words.

It might be thought that, because Basic often has to use a *description* of a thing or event in place of the *name* of the thing or event, a Basic translation must always be longer (contain more words) than the original. If all writing were highly condensed, terse, concise and factual that would be true. But how often, on the contrary, do we meet with writing of the type exemplified above! And it is writing of this kind that can be broken down into a simpler, more direct and more forceful wording. In striving to find equivalents for phrases like 'with regard to', 'with reference to', 'in the case of', 'arising out of', 'as far as . . . is concerned', we realize for the first time that they are saying nothing, that they are in fact merely 'cliches' exploited by a lazy mind to avoid having to think. When these and all similar empty phrases are eliminated the Basic version is often found to be far more compact and concise. This is well brought out in Basic translations of business and legal or semi-legal phraseology. Take as an example a paragraph from a Basic version of the *Burma Railways Rules and Regulations* which is being prepared, unofficially, to help the drivers, guards and

cleaners who have to observe them. Here are the original and the Basic side by side.

### RULE 83

#### *Original*

If in consequence of a fog or storm or for any other reason the view of signals is obstructed the driver shall take every possible precaution especially when approaching a station or junction so as to have the train well under control.

(42 words)

#### *Basic*

If a driver has not a good view of his signals he will go as slowly as necessary to keep out of danger.

(23 words)

Someone may protest that the Basic "leaves out a lot". If it were thought necessary to list *every* possible reason for bad visibility, fog and storm would naturally be included. If all but two are summed up vaguely by 'or for any other reason' why mention specifically these two? The rule is clear enough — *whatever* the reason! Then again, why "every possible precaution"? Can the driver take *impossible* ones? Why "especially when approaching a station or junction"? Is this not calculated to make the driver more careless on the open track? The Basic Rule says all that is needed to convey a warning which, if it is not observed, will land the driver in serious trouble. And how much easier it is for him to read and learn. There are in all some hundreds of rules like this one!

## Condensation

The training in condensation provided by Basic translation is, I think, particularly needed in countries like India where English is not, as a rule, built up word by word but is swallowed in chunks — each chunk being a set phrase, idiom or proverb learnt by heart. So busily is the learner engaged in stuffing down these word-groups that he has little time to find out what they mean, with results that are too well known to every teacher to require description. Discussing the precis in the High School Examination the Examiner says:

The precis, in spite of its being so simple, was very badly done. . . The answers produced very few attempts to express the main ideas in new terms more brief and simple than the original. Efforts to achieve brevity by a random selection of fragments of the original merely produced nonsensical jumbles for which little or no marks were given.

I suggest that if the examinees had been trained to put the most important ideas of a piece of prose into Basic English, and had been asked to do this at the examination, such 'nonsensical jumbles' would have been impossible.

Moreover the concentration on 'texts' inevitably leaves the learner with a bookish kind of English which is never heard in England itself. The student should be taught that there are simpler ways of saying things than those he habitually employs, that the simpler ways are the truly English ways. And for such teaching there is no better instrument than Basic, for by its very nature it is calculated to turn the licence of unrestrained exuberance in writing into the true liberty of self-knowledge and self-control.

## CHAPTER 16

### POETRY — APATHY OR APPRECIATION?

I want now to turn to one form of word-magic which is stylistically legitimate and morally irreproachable—Poetry.

Hitherto we have regarded suggestion-words as concealed and insidious enemies seeking to drug our logical faculties, to exploit our feelings and emotions, to sway us towards some belief or course of action which the speaker or writer would have us adopt or pursue. But the use and exploitation of suggestion-words is not always inimical to our intellectual integrity. When Shakespeare writes:

The multitudinous Seas incarnadine,  
Making the Greene one Red

he uses words ('multitudinous', 'incarnadine') as fully charged with feeling, emotion, suggestiveness, as 'liquor traffic' and 'dictator' are on the lips of the propagandist. And it is perhaps as much for his skill in word-magic as for his skill in the portrayal of character that he is worshipped and revered.

The difference, it is clear, is wholly one of intention and of effect. Shakespeare, we know, had no axe to grind. He was a poet, an artist. The law of his being compelled him to write, and he wrote, in his plays, about the axes that men do grind, and why and how and with what results they grind them. Macbeth's 'axe' was his ambition to be King, and it was solely to describe in all their intensity his horror and remorse after the dread-



ful act which had made him King that Shakespeare employs these two suggestion words. Nothing, he suggests, can wipe the bloodstain from Macbeth's hands; if he plunged them into the multitudinous seas the seas too would turn red with blood, and still his hands would be bloody.

Manifestly there is nothing objectionable in such a use of word-magic; its effect is to turn us *away* from murder, if ever we felt that way inclined. On the contrary, our great aim and object as teachers of English literature is to instil into our students an *intelligent appreciation* of the art of such word-magic as practised by the poet. And here lies the difficulty. As teachers, it seems, we have *not* succeeded in conveying to our students our sense of the wonder and the glory of that word-magic; if we had, they would not leave poetry behind them in the schoolroom with their initials carved on desks and their books flung into corners; if we had, they would not rate money-making, wife-getting, sport and power higher than the things of the mind; if we had, in fact, poetry would not be the poor, despised, neglected thing it is to-day.

### 'Lend Me Your Ears'

As an example of our utter and abysmal failure Dr. Richards quotes a typical paragraph which appeared in the *Evening Standard*, a London newspaper with a very large circulation. It was written, we must suppose, by a typical product of the English school system, and it shows what sort of comment on Shakespeare is considered likely to appeal to all or most of the other products of the English school system.

Shakespeare last night, Shakespeare tonight. Most listeners will prefer tonight's version. That given yesterday was an insult to the majority of listeners.

*Antony and Cleopatra* is Shakespeare's least popular play, and yet the B.B.C. thought fit to give it for two long and wearisome hours. It is one of his least moral plays — yet the B.B.C. consider it suitable for Sunday listening!

Tonight the Bard comes to the microphone in a different manner. *He is the lyric writer for a new dance-band signature tune.* Maurice Winnick brings Ciro's back to the microphone tonight.

His band will sign on and off with a melody specially written to the words *Lend Me Your Ears*. Shakespeare will have twenty times as many listeners tonight as last night.

*Antony and Cleopatra* an insult! *Antony and Cleopatra*, which is studded with gems of word-magic as beautiful as any to be found in English literature!

We have no reason to suppose that such a comment would be taken less seriously in Bombay or Rangoon than it was in London. We know for a fact that the average Indian student, once he has shaken the dust of school or college off his feet, reads *nothing* worth while, let alone Shakespeare or Milton. Who can doubt then that whether we teach in England or in India we have failed. Why have we failed?

‘ The conditions under which ‘ appreciation ’ is taught in England and in India are not, of course, exactly the same. But the reasons for failure, in the upper reaches of English-teaching, are, I think, more or less identical. Most poetry, whether lyrical or dramatic, epic or elegiac, is *difficult*. The words themselves tend to be difficult

(not used in everyday speech), the order of words is often peculiar, and the ideas behind the words are not easily disentangled.

Starting from that point the chief reason for failure is not hard to find. Difficulties demand explanation; explanation kills interest. That is all there is to it. I often think that Wordsworth's 'we murder to dissect' was meant to apply as much to *interest* in the thing as to the thing dissected.

### How to Explain?

There is no doubt that the 'notes' and 'glossaries', whether written or spoken, are chiefly to blame for the present apathy to great literature. With this thought uppermost in their minds many teachers have sought to dispense with explanation, content if the child can catch and retain something of the sensuous beauty of the language — its assonance, rhyme and rhythm. But the results are little better. The pupil may enjoy listening to a well-read poem; he may indeed catch something of its beauty. But without understanding he cannot read it to himself in such a way as to bring out its beauty. Soon the impression of the beauty fades. The puzzle remains unsolved, and he will never take it up, in later years, to attempt a solution himself. Clearly, if poetry (as Aristotle says) is to be appreciated as "a more general, a more serious thing than history"; or as "a record of the best and happiest hours of the best and happiest minds" (Shelley); or as "the breath and higher part of all knowledge" (Wordsworth), it must *first* be understood.

It seems then that some sort of explanation is inevitable, and that success depends on the right kind of explanation. Which is the right sort of explanation?

"In the poetry lesson," we are told in one important book, "the attention of the pupils is concentrated not on the words of the poem, but on their prose equivalents. The poetry lesson is concerned too largely with the meanings of words instead of with the words themselves. Preoccupied with disentangling the intricacy and obscurity of language and structure, and with trying to catch the thought or motive depicted in the poem, the words of the poet are lost sight of by the student, or at best receive only scant attention."

But how, asks the perplexed teacher, can we concern ourselves with the words of the poet *without* examining their meanings? Will merely reading them, or staring at them, reveal their meanings to the student? And if we are to explain anything at all, how can we do so without falling back on 'prose equivalents'?

## Breaking Down

And this brings us to the crux of the matter. Successful explanation, which means successful teaching, must depend largely on the choice of 'prose-equivalents'. First it must be made clear to the student that for a word used in a line of good poetry there can be *no* real equivalent. Either the word used is 'inevitable'—or the poetry is not good poetry. Secondly he must be shown *why* the word is inevitable if the right effect is to be achieved. This can be done only by analysis, and I suggest the analysis will nearly always be of the kind which separates statement from suggestion, fact from feeling. Breaking down a 'poetical' word into its

Basic elements ensures, first, that the analysis will be understood, and, secondly, that it will reveal the true value of the word.

We come, for example, to the word 'meadow'. Why not 'field', which is the statement-sense? Because a 'meadow' is something more than a 'field'; it has a suggestion of 'very green' and 'smooth' and 'beautiful', of 'peace' and 'rest' and 'quiet'.

Or we come to 'perfume'. The statement-word is 'smell', but a perfume is more than a smell; it is a 'sweet', 'strange', 'beautiful' smell.

Or let us go back for a moment to *Macbeth* — 'multitudinous' and 'incarnadine'. For words such as these there cannot possibly be 'prose-equivalents', and it is idle to seek them. But what we can do is to list, item by item, all the ingredients of *sense* that go to make up the total effect.

*Multitudinous*: The great spaces, the motion, the expansion; the crowding of the waves without number and without end.

*Incarnadine*: The shock when the idea of blood is joined with that of water, "water, water, everywhere", and the way in which it seems not only to be coloured with the blood but itself to become a sea of blood; all this with the deeper suggestion of a living existence that is suddenly given to the waste of blood...

Analysis of this kind can be done in Basic (the above in fact *is* in Basic) as completely as in a foreign language; with the great advantages, first, that it is *certain* to be understood, and second, that it cannot possibly make any pretensions to replacing or reproducing the original.

Furthermore I believe that to the average student this kind of analysis will prove as interesting as the usual paraphrase exercise is dull. Most young people have an itch to take things apart and see how they work, and this can be made to apply as much to the language-machine as to a motor-car engine.

### **Skilful Dissection**

It may seem that this again, where words are concerned, is 'murdering to dissect', but it is my belief that beauty is murdered only when the dissection is badly and haphazardly done. Dissection on Basic lines forces the student to realize that when a word has been taken to bits and the bits laid on the operating-table there is something intangible, indefinable, spiritual if you like, in the word itself not to be found in the sum-total of all its parts. When he realizes that he has taken his first big step towards 'appreciation'.

The ordinary paraphrase of poetry is as useless for teaching or eliciting 'appreciation' as the ordinary paraphrase of prose is useless for teaching or eliciting understanding.

We have already seen (page 42) what happens when the teacher relies upon his own resources to explain new words. He is not a lexicographer; it is inevitable therefore that in his explanations he should sometimes use words which are not understood, or do not exactly convey both the sense and the suggestion of the word explained. We have seen too what happens when he goes to the ordinary English dictionary for assistance; between definition and cross-definition he flounders in a sea of perplexity. What, then, can be expected from the student who has to rely either on

the teacher or on the dictionary? His idea of paraphrase is a mere shuffling about of synonyms at the same level, without any clear aim and certainly with no profit. What wonder that such a method should have failed.

My suggestions then are these:

- (1) That the shuffling about of synonyms should give way to the breaking-down of words through analysis of their elements.
- (2) That this analysis should be based on a technique of definition which provides an *absolute* standard of simplicity — Basic English.
- (3) That concurrently with the use of the *Basic English Dictionary* students should be given an insight, through analysis and study of the system itself, into the workings of language in the way described by the teacher I have quoted.

In a book of this kind I cannot do more than give suggestions. Fortunately, however, there are already two other books in which the teacher may find not merely suggestions but a definite plan of action, with examples, for the use of Basic as an instrument both for teaching 'appreciation' and for developing interpretive capacity. They are *Basic in Teaching: East and West*, by Dr. I. A. Richards, and *Statement and Suggestion* (in Basic) by Mr. A. P. Rossiter.

I hope that what I have written about the advantages and possibilities of 'breaking-down' will prove of sufficient interest to some teachers at least to make them want to read these two books.

## CHAPTER 17

### SCIENCE—THOUGHT OR LANGUAGE ?

English for the science student raises a special problem in itself. Not one but scores of university lecturers in foreign countries have told me that when students come to them for training in science they still do not know enough English, after eight or ten years of study, to be able even to follow their lectures. Lecturers have to waste half their time explaining 'operating words' which have nothing to do with scientific terminology as such. Students have to waste half their time in further studies in non-scientific English, in order to be able to read fluently and explain themselves clearly. They have to give so much time to the language that they have little time left for thought.

So great is this difficulty that at least one country, Japan, is seriously considering the abandonment of English entirely in favour of Japanese, 'modernized' by the inclusion of the necessary technical terms. That might solve the lecturer's difficulty, *if all the lecturers were themselves Japanese*, but it would not solve the student's difficulty in keeping abreast of developments in other countries. An important work might take five years to translate, and during that time, so rapid is scientific development, its conclusions might well become out of date. And could a small country, with a 'minor' language, afford the cost of such translation? H. G. Wells has stated the problem very clearly in his *Anticipations*:



The native of a small country who knows no other language than the tongue of his country becomes increasingly at a disadvantage in comparison with the user of any of the great languages of the Europeanized world. For his literature he depends on the scanty writers who are in his own case, and write, or have written, in his own tongue. Necessarily they are few because necessarily with a small public there can be only small subsistence for a few. For his science he is in a worse case. His country can produce neither teachers nor discoverers to compare with the numbers of such workers in larger areas, and it will pay them neither to write original matter for his instruction nor to translate what has been written in other tongues.

The inducements to an Englishman, Frenchman or German to become bilingual are great enough nowadays, but the inducements to a speaker of the smaller languages are rapidly approaching compulsion. He must do it in self-defence. To be an educated man in his own vernacular has become an impossibility. He must either become a mental subject of one of the greater languages or sink to the intellectual status of a peasant.

The logic of circumstances is deciding which of the 'greater languages' the language of science is to be — English. English is already the language of science in countries like China, Japan, India and Burma. But it must be admitted that the students who have to learn through it are not too happy; nor are the English lecturers who have to teach through it, and therefore, as I have said, there is always the possibility of a violent reaction against it.

But where is the necessity? If lecturers were to restrict themselves to the Basic 'operating words', as *Basic for Science* has shown they *can* do, these difficul-

ties would automatically disappear. Students could follow lectures after *two* years of English; no further training in English as such would be necessary.

The power of Basic to simplify scientific discussion arises, apart from the principles of panoptic elimination and verbal analysis, from four great contributions which Basic has made to the cause of science itself.

The first was its division into four distinct groups of the words needed by scientists.

### The Words We Use

1. *Operating Words.* These are the 850 words of Basic English as listed in the front of this book. They provide all the verbs, prepositions, conjunctions, etc. necessary to put into operation any set of *names* needed for any particular purpose.

2. *General Science Words.* Scientific discussion may be considered as such a particular purpose, and to make the connection between ordinary everyday language and the language of science Basic adds 100 more words such as 'arrangement', 'case', 'demonstration', 'difficulty', 'explanation' and 'investigation'.

These additions to Basic are necessary only when it is used by experts writing for experts; nothing but the 850 words of the general list are needed in writing about science at a simple level for a wider public. They have not been used, for example, in *The Outlook of Science*, by Professor J. B. S. Haldane.

That is to say, the 100 words can all be avoided by the use of substitutions drawn from the general list, but experience in translating scientific books for experts into Basic showed that their inclusion makes the translator's task very much simpler. They are all words which are

either in constant demand themselves or can be used as convenient substitutes for other words which are constantly in demand. For example, 'investigation' may not seem to be a very essential word, but its value is made clearer when it is pointed out that it can be used instead of 'search', 'inquiry', 'survey' and 'examination'. Even with the addition of these 100 general science words the Basic list is still as nothing compared with the enormous amount of 'verbal padding' which Basic has eliminated from scientific discussion.

The following are a few examples of the way in which difficult terms have been avoided:

analogous	—	like
approximate	—	rough
bifurcation	—	forking
in succession	—	in turn, one after another
practical	—	of use, (in some particular connection)

3. *Special Science Words.* The 950 words of general science (850 + 100) may in their turn be used to put into operation the special list of fifty words which has been allotted to each particular science. Thus among the special words are:

*For Mathematics:*

circumference, denominator, inertia, etc.

*For Chemistry and Physics:*

burette, density, frequency, shadow, etc.

*For Economics:*

asset, bill, cost, supply, demand, rent, etc.

Similar lists have been worked out for astronomy, geology, business, logic and other subjects.

These special science lists, like the general science list, do not of course include all the technical terms to be found in books on these subjects. Many technical words have been found to be as easily dispensed with as any other words. For example, the following go simply enough into Basic:—

fluid	liquid or gas
desiccator	drying vessel
titration	volume analysis
dissection	cutting up

4. *International Terms.* The last division includes all those *names* which are used by scientists internationally.

As an example of these there are the signs in chemistry, where the structure of a substance is pictured by letters and numbers ( $H_2O$  = Water) without any words. Obviously it would be neither possible nor necessary for any international language, whether natural or artificial, to include these in its general vocabulary. There are, for example, 10,000 names of ants alone, but they are known to and needed by no one except the entomologist, and entomologists all over the world, whatever their language or nationality, use the same names.

None of these three groups outside the Basic list are part of the Basic school course as such. The idea is first, to give all learners all the words they need for the operation of special vocabularies. Those who afterwards go on to "Arts" will learn the 100 words that

make the connection between ordinary every-day talk and 'literature'— words like

bride, faith, honour, stream, wisdom, wonder.

Those who go on to "Science" will learn the words that make the connection with Science. And how will they learn them? In the same way as the Englishman learns them. The Englishman is not born, as some foreigners seem to suppose, with an instinctive knowledge of the word 'burette'. Indeed, he passes perhaps the first fifteen years of his life in blissful ignorance that there is such a thing. Then when he goes into the laboratory for his first lesson in chemistry he hears the teacher say, "Now I take this burette and with it . . . . . ." And so 'burette' passes into his vocabulary.

## Esperanto

The value of such a classification of words, as a method of ensuring intelligibility in any particular field, may be seen more clearly by contrast with the structure of Esperanto, the most successful of the artificial languages constructed for international purposes. Esperanto is a collection of "1,863" professedly useful roots, taken from a number of European languages, from which an indefinite number of new words may be formed by anyone who has taken the trouble (and it is *some* trouble) to familiarize himself with the grammatical inflexions and with the meaning and uses of about 50 prefixes, suffixes and infixes. Thus

nacio	—	nation
nacia	—	national
naciigo	—	nationalization

I mention these roots as *professedly* useful, because one is entitled to doubt the fundamental utility of a list which includes, for example,

anchovy (three kinds), abbot, garlic, hawk,  
pimple, grasshopper, chalice and navel

and excludes

religion, prison, telegram, cable and radio.

And I put 1,863 in inverted commas because a glance at any Esperanto-English dictionary will show that the number of roots in actual use is anything between 4,000 and 10,000.

But the cardinal weakness of Esperanto — apart from the fact that for almost two-thirds of the world it is merely one more European dialect, like French or Spanish — is that it *alters* terms which are already good international coinage in order to make them good Esperanto coinage. It insists, for example, that every noun shall end in 'o'. Thus 'club', a word which is known to the poorest Indian coolie, becomes 'klubo'.

That is, there is no distinction between general 'operating-words' and words which may be put into operation by them for particular purposes. Or, in other words, all really international words are eliminated, and the 'fundamental' list is swollen with a hotch-potch of unnecessary words with a strange tendency to include all those of ecclesiastical (Christian) or gastronomic interest which are useless to nine-tenths of the world's population.

This then, the division of words into 'general' and 'scientific', 'operating' and 'naming', is the first great

contribution Basic has made to the simplification of scientific discussion.

### Fixation of Meanings

The second follows from the first. In selecting the special words needed by each science it was found that scientists themselves are not always agreed about the meaning of the words used by that science. Perhaps the worst offenders in this respect are the 'economists', who may often be found to be arguing about different things *as though* they were the same thing, and also about *seemingly* different things which *actually are* the same thing. This is necessarily a cause of trouble, the outcome being that economists are quite unable to keep questions of language separate from questions of fact, and frequently have long arguments about words in the belief that they are making discoveries about the economic system.

For example, to economists of the old school 'inflation' is generally the process of increasing the amount of money in circulation till there is an over-supply of it in relation to goods, and so it is *necessarily* bad; to supporters of the new American planning it is simply the process of increasing the amount of money in circulation, and at a time when there is an under-supply of money in relation to goods it is looked on as a step *much to be desired*.

Basic gets round this difficulty in two ways — first, by eliminating all words whose meaning is in doubt; secondly, by *fixing the definitions* of those words that are kept so that there can be no doubt about what they stand for.

This brings us to Basic's third great contribution to science. It has drawn the attention of the world to the need for scientific committees in different countries to decide which words may be accepted as 'international' and what exactly these words stand for, so that there will be no more arguing at cross-purposes. The inventors of Basic have themselves been working in close collaboration with scientists in various countries in connection with the selection of the special words and the fixing of their meanings, but much work still remains to be done in this field. Basic has only shown the way.

Meanwhile sufficient progress has already been made to enable the Basic research department to start work on a special Dictionary of 20,000 science words whose senses will be given entirely in Basic, with the help of which anybody who has learnt Basic will be able to read scientific works in normal English. And this is the fourth contribution which Basic is making towards the simplification of scientific teaching and learning.



**PART THREE**  
**CONCLUSION**



## CHAPTER 18

### BASIC AND THE NATIONS

‘What,’ asks the British Esperanto Association, ‘is the *real* aim of Basic? For its advocates speak with two voices on this point. Is it intended to be a stepping-stone to English? If so, it may be helpful to that end... If, on the other hand, Basic is advocated as itself a solution of the international language problem, it is clear that this claim is completely illusory...’

Having spoken at some length with one of my ‘two voices’ I now propose to speak with the other. And the first thing I want to say with it is this:

*The ‘real’ aim of Basic is to meet every sort of need for a simplified English that history and circumstances have created.*

Two such needs I have already described: first, the need of the foreign learner for a short cut to English; second, the need of both the Englishman and the foreign student for an instrument of analysis, a control, a check, a guide, a discipline, a return to first principles, a means to a closer adjustment between thought and language.

Thus people who would deny any connection between these two needs might also, like the Esperantist, but from a different standpoint, denounce my ‘double-voiced’ tactics. But in their case the irony would take this form:

‘What is the real aim of Basic? Its advocates speak with two voices on this point. Is it intended

as a stepping-stone to English? Or is it advocated as a solution to the problem of word-magic?’

### ‘Three Voices’

So that if this irony too is taken seriously I stand condemned, on *all* sides, as not a ‘double-voiced’ but a ‘triple-voiced’ hypocrite, changing my appeal all the time to suit my company. In the chapter on the ‘building-up’ of language I spoke with one voice; in the chapter on the ‘breaking-down’ of thought I spoke with the second. Now, in talking of ‘Basic and the nations’, I resort to the third. To the teacher in search of a stepping-stone I have said, ‘Take Basic.’ To the psychologist in search of a discipline I have said, ‘Take Basic.’ And to the internationalist in search of a language I now say, ‘Take Basic.’ Truly all things to all men!

But I hope that no one who has followed me thus far will be inclined to take such irony seriously. What I have above all tried to make clear is that any introduction to English which claims to be scientific *must* inevitably and automatically be able to function as an instrument of analysis. If a ladder is the best ladder for climbing up, it must also be the best ladder for climbing down. If, with a certain formula, it is possible to create a new compound, it must also be possible, with the same formula, to analyse that compound. The engine which goes fastest ‘in top’ will naturally go fastest ‘in reverse’. Scientific definition, which is the basis of linguistic analysis, is merely, as we have seen, pan-optic elimination in reverse.

So much, then, for *these* 'two voices'. And the third? It likewise has no separate existence; it too is but an echo, a concomitant, a corollary, an inevitable development of the same one great central epoch-making discovery—the possibilities of the scientific simplification of English. Even if we tried to stifle it we could not. Because, whether we wish it or not, every child and every adult who sits down to learn English sits down to learn what is already in fact something approaching an international language.

### English and Esperanto

English, unlike Esperanto, has had no Association to advocate its claims, to send out leaflets, to confound its critics, or itself to criticize rivals. And yet in the past thirty years, while Esperantists have been glad to make a few converts here and there, it has become, without a shadow of doubt, more widely known and more widely used than any other language known to man throughout his history. It is the mother-tongue of the 200,000,000 people (one-tenth of the world's population) of America, Britain and the widely-scattered British Dominions. It is the Governmental language of the 400,000,000 people of India and Burma and the British Colonies. It is the language in which most of the world's business is conducted. It is the chief language of the radio and the talkies. And *because* it is all these it has in recent years been adopted as the second language in the schools of all the chief countries of the world.

This is all far too well known to need labouring. Any comparison between the *usefulness* of Esperanto

and English is, to say the least, utterly ridiculous. Out of about 100,000 registered Esperantists, collected after nearly fifty years of propaganda, about 30,000 may be presumed to have some knowledge of the system. For Esperanto to get to the position with which English now *starts* it would be necessary to make *100,000 Esperantist converts a week for the next 100 years*. And by that time the natural increase of the English-speaking peoples, and the further spread of English, would leave Esperanto relatively in the same position as it is now. Even if Esperanto were a perfect language, and could be learnt in five months instead of five years, it is very doubtful whether it would make much headway; for its usefulness depends entirely on the extent to which others may use it, and since all people are 'others' to all 'others' nobody will ever use it. If therefore I have gone out of my way, as I did in my last chapter, to show why Esperanto is in fact very far from being perfect, it is not because I regard it as a serious rival to English for international honours, but merely in order to clarify, by comparison, the principles on which Basic English works as an international language of science.

But what, I may be asked, are you comparing — Esperanto and English, or Esperanto and *Basic* English? To which I reply, 'Basic English is English'. If every foreigner who learns English uses Basic as a first step every foreigner who learns English will know Basic English. But if so many foreigners are learning 'complete' English why bother to make *Basic* the international language? Why not let 'complete' English work out its own destiny? Because,

quite simply, no one can define what 'complete' English means. Is it an English of 25,000 words, or 10,000 words, or 5,000 words? Is it *New Method* English or *Oxford Course* English or Tipping's *Rapid Reader* English? Is it the English of the Bible or the English of Bernard Shaw? How can anyone be sure, when, if ever, he comes to broadcast an International News Bulletin from the Geneva World Radio, that a word like 'competent' or 'concentrate' or 'collaborate' will be known to *every* foreigner who can be said to have 'learnt English'?

That is, in the same way as Basic provides a *standard of simplicity* for purposes of class explanation and definition (see page 43), so can it provide a *standard of intelligibility* for purposes of international exposition and description. Because it is complete in itself it can be accepted as the *lowest common denominator* of linguistic intercourse. Not everyone who knows Basic will know 'complete' English, whatever that may mean, but everyone who knows 'complete' English will know Basic English. Hence Basic as an International Language.

### Lowest Common Denominator

This *lowest common denominator* aspect of Basic English deserves a further word of explanation. The teaching of English in foreign countries is usually confined to middle and high schools. The course lasts from five to eight or ten years. Because there is no hope of imparting a working knowledge of English in less time than this, no attempt is made, as a rule, to teach it in primary schools. Where attempts are made the results are invariably so poor

that sooner or later the idea is abandoned. For English teaching to have any value at all, that is, it must reach a certain standard. If it does not reach that standard then money, time and energy have been sacrificed in vain.

But judging from the numerous attempts that *have* been made there is no doubt that English *would* be taught even in primary schools if it could be shown that one or two years of instruction would enable the pupil to express himself on any subject with ease, read simplified books on any subject with ease, and use a dictionary, with ease, to expand his vocabulary to any extent desired.

All this Basic can do, has done, is doing, and will do on an ever-increasing scale. So that whereas today the great majority of foreign learners may be assumed to have progressed beyond some indeterminate elementary stage, no such assumption will be possible in, say, ten years' time. By then a much greater number will have left school knowing *only* Basic English. How many will go on by *themselves* to expand their vocabulary, and how far they will get, the projected International Radio Commission in Geneva will have no means of determining. And no more will the scientist writing a treatise for international distribution, or the business man drafting an advertisement for international circulation, or the film company producing a talkie for international exhibition. If they wish to be universally understood they will all be forced to rely on Basic English.

But such reliance, again, rests upon another assumption — that English-speaking people will themselves take the trouble to learn Basic English.



or rather to unlearn. for international purposes, everything outside the Basic limits. Will they in fact take the trouble? I think they will. If it is taught, for 'breaking-down' purposes, in the school-room, as everything seems to indicate it will, Basic will become part of the equipment with which every English boy and girl leaves school. For them the writing of a letter in Basic will be no trouble at all.

But even for the adult who has long left school, the trouble, as we have seen (page 242), is not very great, and if he finds that 90 per cent of his customers abroad find Basic easier, if he finds that most of the hotel-porters, train-guards, policemen and people in general that he talks to on his travels find Basic easier, he will soon learn to restrict his vocabulary to their level, just as he does almost *instinctively* in talking to a child.

## The Word Bridge

But it is the 'breaking-down' aspect of Basic, I think, that will ultimately and officially inspire and govern the 'bridge-building' operations on the English-speakers' side of the gulf that now separates them from the outside world. Figure 31 (page 275) gives a symbolic representation of this bridging process. In the East, and in foreign countries generally, Basic, because of its great advantages, will more and more come to be taught both as a complete and practical English in itself in primary schools, and as a stepping-stone to English, as a foundation for scientific synthetic expansion, as a nucleus for 'building-up', in middle and high schools. In the West it will more and more come to be used as an instrument for

the scientific analysis of word-magic, whether propagandist or literary, as a check to stylistic exuberances in composition, and as a microscope for the study of the workings of language.

AB is the initial learning stage for the foreigner; BC is his one-level 'reading for knowledge' practice period; CD represents his expansion to 'complete' English.

DE is the descent to a lower level forced on the English speaker by his teachers or by purely economic considerations. EF is his one-level 'translation-paraphrase' practice period. FG represents his study of the relations between things and words.

ABFG is the territory that in this way is made common to both. BDF is the bridge of easy communication and mutual understanding resting on the Basic foundation.

Enough has now been said, I hope, to show that the 'triple-voice of Basic deception' is but the single authentic voice of linguistic truth.

The 'real' aim of Basic, I repeat, is to meet every sort of need for a simplified English that history and circumstances have created.

What, to be more precise, are these needs? Whence do they derive?

History and circumstances have created three kinds of need for a simplified English. There is the need of the foreign learner for a simple practical English both for its own sake and for the sake of the rapid, systematic progress which it makes possible; there is the need of both Englishman and foreigner for a discipline in English; there is the need of the business men, the scientists and the

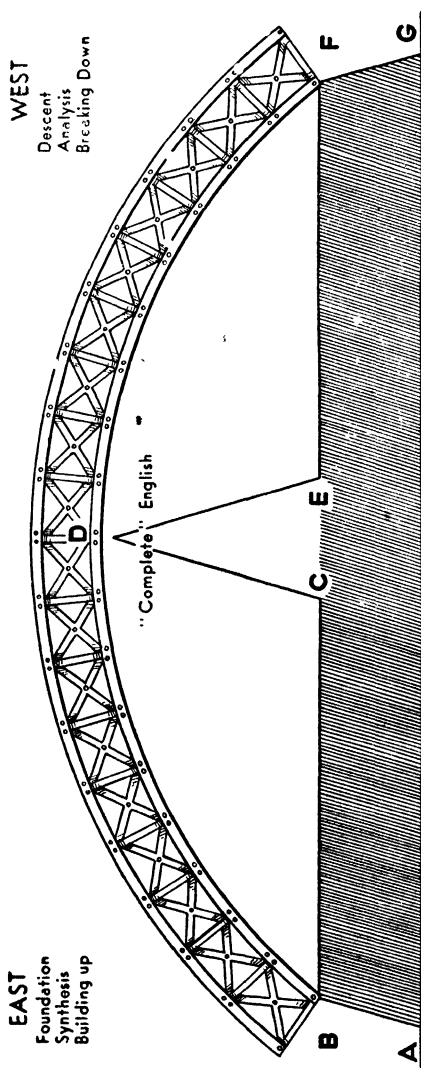


Figure 32. The Word Bridge

statesmen of all nations for a simple, easily learnt medium of communication which will eliminate the waste of time and the misunderstanding involved in translating and interpreting. Never have these three needs been greater or more urgent than they are today; never has it been more vital that they should be satisfied; and never has their close inter-connection been more easily apparent.

For if Basic claims to satisfy each of these three needs it is because fundamentally they are *not* three separate needs, though superficially they may appear to be so. Fundamentally they are merely three aspects of one and the same need, *and that is the need for a more rational conduct of the world's affairs*, for real peace in place of the armed peace which is indistinguishable from war, and for the unfettered development of world-cooperation and world-organization.

Why have men like Mr. Litvinoff (Russia), Mr. Yen (China), Mr. Sato (Japan), representing between them more than 700,000,000 people, chosen to address their European public always in English? Why has Mussolini found it necessary to make a talking film in English? Why have countries like the Argentine, Siam, Germany, Lithuania, Sweden and Turkey, each one typical of a group, found it necessary to give increasing prominence to English in their educational systems? Because they admire the English? Because they love English for its own sake? Hardly! Clearly it is because as they have found themselves becoming more and more inter-dependent for the satisfaction of their economic needs, so has it become more and more necessary

for them to possess an instrument of communication with the outside world. If French had been the language of trade, if French were as widespread as English, they would have chosen French. They have chosen English as chief foreign language because it is, if not fully international, then at least the *most* international language that there is. And the greater the number of countries that realize this (there are now few who do not) the more international in its scope it will become.

That is to say, the foreign learner who needs a simplified English either for its own sake or as a stepping stone, and the foreigner who needs English as an international language, are not two separate persons. They are one and inseparable because the need is one and inseparable. And this need is greater than it has ever been because the world is so much 'smaller' than it has ever been before. And also, we must now add, because scientific knowledge is so much more important than it has ever been before.

### Science is International

It is, of course, the enormous increase of scientific knowledge, the emphasis on scientific method, the internationalism of scientific research, which above all distinguish the modern world from the world of Julius Caesar, from the world of Henry VIII and even from the world of Napoleon. Only 100 years ago it was possible for a man to make himself an expert in almost every branch of science. Today, to achieve anything at all, he must concentrate on one small 'twig' on only one of these branches. Only

100 years ago science was unknown to the people of the East, of India, China and Japan. Today thousands of them are learning science either in their own countries or abroad; and not only learning science but making new scientific discoveries. Before long these thousands will become tens of thousands. And thus the question arises: Is the Siamese medical man, for example, to get his training in the language of his own country or in a language which will give him a key to scientific developments in all countries?

I have already dealt with this question, and I raise it again here only to emphasize that the need for a simplified English for science, like the need for a simplified English for business, is an *international* need. Basic does not say to the Japanese medical man, 'You are learning or teaching your science in *Japanese*. That has grave drawbacks. Basic is an international language. Why not use Basic?' It says to him, 'Because science is international you are learning or teaching your science in *English*. But there are great difficulties. Basic is a simpler form of English which is yet adequate to all your needs. Would it not be more rational to use Basic?'

But, finally, the need for a simplified English for science is itself only another aspect of the need for a weapon against word-magic.

## Science and Word-Magic

At no time and in no place has man been free from the magic of words. In every age he has attributed to them occult powers; everywhere they have possessed for him a "certain bewitchery or fascina-

tion which makes them operate with a force beyond what we can naturally give account." But in some ways the Twentieth Century suffers more than any previous age from the ravages of verbal superstition. The spread of bare literacy, as distinct from 'education', on the one hand, and the rise of the printing press, radio and talkie on the other, have created between them a generation which is defenceless before the word-magic of politicians, propagandists and publicity hawkers.

'If we could open the heads,' says Professor Fraser (in *Psyche's Task*) 'and read the thoughts of two men of the same generation and country, but at opposite ends of the intellectual scale, we should probably find their minds as different as if the two belonged to different species.....' In spite of their veneer of civilisation, he says, most people have remained barbarians or savages at heart.

Now I cannot, here, go into all the ways in which word-magic exploits barbarism and savagery. But I can say, without fear of contradiction, that every such form of exploitation is anti-social, from a world point of view, in its effects. We are living in an age when sheer self-preservation demands that men should come together and work together. The idea is a commonplace of international politics: no one denies it: reason demands it; common sense dictates it. Anything, therefore, which tends to divide men and to disunite the world must be opposed to reason and to common sense. And chief of all the things opposed to reason and to common sense are the verbal superstitions which hold men in thrall. It is superstition, created and nourished by the

power of word-magic, which lies at the back of the fears, the jealousies and the desires that drive men to war: it is superstition, a complex of ideas which have no basis in reality, which bars the way to a more rational conduct of the world's affairs and so to world organization and cooperation.

In other words the great task of education today is to bring men face to face with reality, to combat superstition in all its forms, religious, political, social and above all verbal, by making science and scientific method interesting to the common man. On the one hand he must be taught to 'see through' the verbal tricks of the propagandist; on the other hand he must be brought into touch with the scientific thought of the age.

With regard to the first of these two objects I have already shown how Basic, by separating the factual from the suggestive elements in words, does its work. A typical comment, made by a student, on a typical piece of commercial propaganda — an advertisement — which had been turned into Basic runs:

The persuasive quality has dropped out. The tone has changed. The dropping out of slang expressions makes it less personal and familiar. The Basic version is probably a more accurate description; but *it would not make anybody want to buy anything.*

And the same findings would apply to 99 per cent of the utterances of politicians and journalists — 'the persuasive quality has dropped out. . . . the Basic version is probably a more accurate description, but it



would not make anybody want to cheat anybody else or suppress anybody else or kill anybody else'.

And as for opening up science to the common man no one who has read the books in 'Our Changing Times' series or the translations of Professor Haldane's works in the 'Psyche' series will doubt Basic's ability to do it. Of the papers in *The Outlook of Science* and *Science and Well-Being* Professor Haldane has even said that in some places his argument is the better for having been put into Basic.

Need I say any more about the close interconnection of these three needs which only Basic can meet and must by its very nature meet at one and the same time? Need I demonstrate further that in meeting any one of them it meets the other two automatically? It remains only to sum up this three-fold approach to a single problem by means of a diagram, and to show how the idea of a three-fold approach is implicit in the evolution of Basic.

Figure 32 (on page 283) shows that all three needs are aspects of the one great need for international co-operation, and whichever aspect we start from we arrive at Basic English.

### Origins of Basic

As for the evolution of Basic it is not commonly known that part of its inspiration came from Jeremy Bentham, the great social engineer, founder of Utilitarianism and 'the greatest happiness of the greatest number' school of philosophy. When Bentham, in the last phase of a long and richly productive career, sat down in 1814 to write his *Theory*

of *Fictions*, the questions he asked himself were these :

1. What can words do for us. That is to say, what is the *nature* of language?
2. What is the nature of psychological language in particular?
3. How are we to think of a 'right' or an 'obligation' when we come to define it?
4. How can we *transiate* a fiction, such as 'force' or 'liberty', into non-fictional language?
5. How can language be *improved*?
6. What can be done about a Universal or *International* language?

For him, that is, the two problems — of combating word-magic based on fictions, and of creating an international language — were inseparable. It was he that first saw that both depend largely on the breaking-up (elimination) of the verb-system; it was he that first realized that in no other language but English is this possible, because no other language has developed analytical tendencies to the same extent as English; it was he that first mooted the possibility of *fixing* the definitions of the scientific terms used by men, so that they would have the same meaning for all men.

'What if', he wrote, 'in this way and by these means the import of all words, especially of all words belonging to the field of Ethics, including the field of Political Religion, should one day become fixed? What a source of perplexity, of error, of discord, and even of bloodshed, would be dried up!'

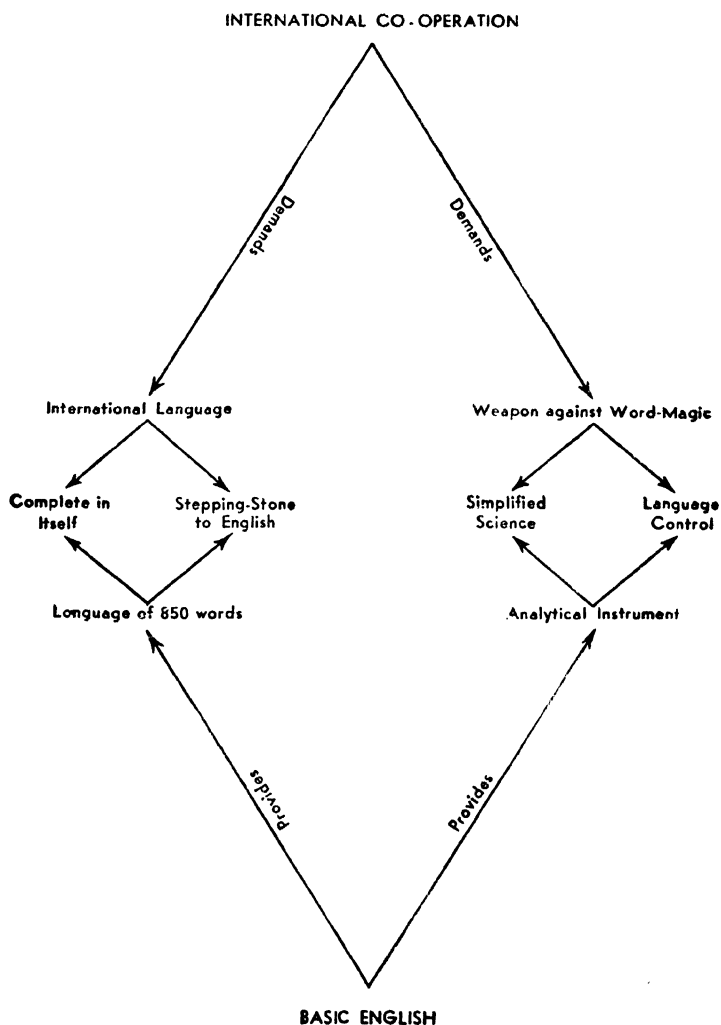


Figure 33. The 'Three Voices'

If he did not see his projected international language as a stepping-stone to English it was because he did not foresee, *could not* foresee, how great would be the demand for English, and how much sooner it would arise than the demand for an international language as such. He could not foresee how rapidly the peoples of the Orient would awaken from the slumber of centuries, and how they would turn to the language of Britain and America (now so much more powerful than then) to slake their thirst for modern knowledge. He could not foresee, finally, that this need for English and demand for English would itself create the further problem of Bilingualism which I have already discussed in Chapter 6.

All this, as I say, Jeremy Bentham, in 1814, could not foresee. But the investigation which he started, which bore such excellent fruit in *The Meaning of Meaning*, and which was crowned with success in *Basic English* — this investigation was inspired, fundamentally, by the same *ideals* as those of the Basic teacher of today.

### **Idealism in the Classroom**

Do not mistake me! I am not saying that every Basic teacher must necessarily be an idealist. He need not believe that possession of a common auxiliary language would of itself put an end to the horrors of war. Indeed he would be foolish if he did — look at Spain! But if ever the world does return to sanity, if ever it does free itself from the spell of word-magic, it is inconceivable that it will tolerate for long the brake that lack of a common language puts on progress. In our so much smaller

world sanity demands that countries should have many things in common — common planning, a common currency, common passports, common standards of weight and measurement, common standards of living. And it is inconceivable, to me at least, that a world which is sane enough to create these things will not be sane enough to exploit the possibilities of *direct* intercommunication through a common auxiliary language. It *must* come; for we have reached a stage where the logic of history demands it.

Anyone, therefore, who does anything at all to help it to come is to that extent identifying himself with the forces making for progress, with the logic of history, with the grand onward sweep of man's destiny. He is to that extent hastening a development which poets and philosophers of all nations and all ages have pleaded for and prophesied. The search for a common tongue has been a long and pathetic one. Esperanto is not the only artificial language that men have constructed for international purposes. There have been others — Volapuk, Ido, Novial. But they have all failed. Everybody has heard of Esperanto, the most successful, as a name, but to all except a few thousand scattered adherents it is still, after nearly fifty years of endeavour, only a name. And so it must remain. Of what value is it? To what career is it the key? What New World does it open? What discipline does it provide?

Even with English as all-important as it is, no teacher would think of taking up Basic merely on the chance that it *might* one day be used for broad-

casts from Geneva. But he is taking it up because it is a solution to so many of his problems, above all the problem of the overcrowded curriculum. And he would not be a true teacher if he did not feel glad that for once plain duty coincides with idealism, if his imagination was not fired, his enthusiasm kindled, by the thought that in employing the most scientific introduction to English that human ingenuity has devised he is also simultaneously forging a weapon against word-magic and paving the way to the first international broadcast from Geneva.

Every word of the Basic 850 which he teaches he will teach with 'three voices'. And if, finding himself thus exposed to the virtuous indignation of the British Esperanto Association, he is inclined to feel shame for his vocal 'triplicity', let him take courage and comfort from the thought that his 'hypocrisy' was the highest aim of no less a man than Jeremy Bentham, and that it is shared by the greatest psychologists and linguists of our time.

## CHAPTER 19

### BASIC AND ITS CRITICS

Before turning to the critics of Basic it might be useful to recapitulate very briefly the fundamental points of the Basic scheme of English teaching. The 'practice-makes-perfect' diagram in Figure 33 (on page 289) sums up in ten points the advantages to be derived from an *organized planning* of the English course.

#### AB—Learning Stage

##### *Basic Way Books I-IV*

1. *Easily learnt*, because of the simplification of grammar and idiom as well as of vocabulary.
2. *Interesting*, because the vocabulary is concrete and lends itself to direct method treatment.
3. *Fool-proof*, because whatever method is adopted mistakes will be repaired and deficiencies remedied in the

#### BC—One-Level Practice Period

##### *Basic Reading Books I-III, Story Series, Knowledge Series, Picture Paper, etc.*

4. *Vocabulary* is drilled in by repetition and passes from passive (reading) to active (speaking and writing) command.
5. *Grammatical* accuracy is achieved through concentration on essentials.
6. *Phonetic* difficulties are minimized by choice of words. Through constant repetition correct speech habits are formed.

7. *Knowledge* is acquired from useful books that will be helpful in other subjects, and a reading habit is established firm enough to withstand the difficulties of the

## CD — Expansion Stage

*Transition Books 5 — 7, Annotated Classics Series* (Footnotes in Basic), *Parallel Classics Series* (English and Basic on opposite pages), *General Dictionary of 25,000 Words, Science Dictionary of 20,000 Words etc.*

8. *Scientific*, because the most useful non-Basic words and constructions are taught first and are spaced out to ease the transition to 'complete' English.
9. *Balanced*, compromise made possible because the less gifted pupils will not be *forced* to make every new word active, while the more gifted will tend to make them active.
10. *Safe*, because pupils can be constantly referred back to Basic as an aid to clarity of thought and expression.

But perhaps most important of all the advantages is the fact that there is a plan at all. How often one goes into a school and finds, for example, Form 4 using a more difficult book than Form 5! Why? Because the headmaster, dissatisfied with the course hitherto in use, has decided to switch over to another, and the two are so widely different that the order of words in the texts in no way corresponds.

I have even been into schools where each teacher is permitted to choose his own textbooks, without reference to the one used in the class below or the one that will be used the following year in the class above! What hope



## THE BASIC PLAN

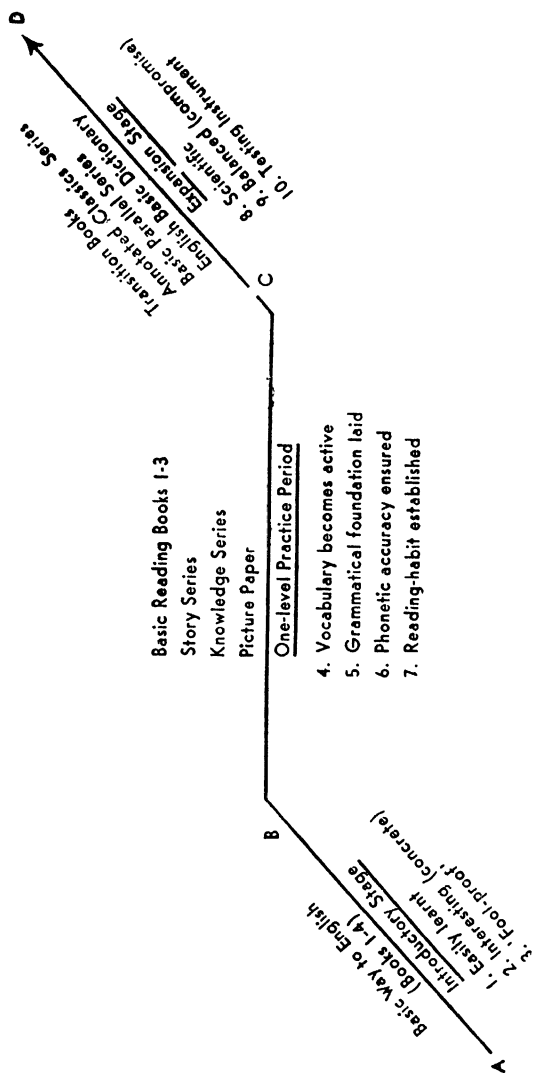


Figure 34. The Basic Plan

can there be, under such conditions, of ordered systematic progress?

The great weakness in the teaching of English in India is just this — its complete lack of organization. There is no plan, no scheme, no schedule for the course *as a whole*. It is shapeless and undirected. Instead of making straight for certain objectives it meanders along like a river among hills, turning and twisting and doubling back on its tracks. In an age when 'planning', for all spheres of life, is so much in the air surely the teaching of English cannot long resist it.

The *idea* of planning in language-teaching is of course not a new one. More than 20 years ago Hardress O'Grady, writing on the teaching of French and German in England, asked:

Is it Utopian to suggest that a Committee..... should set itself to consider what are in fact the most necessary words and phrases of a language, what words come next in importance, then the words needed for a proper appreciation of literature, poetry, history, economics?.....These words would be allocated to the first year, the second year, the third year, the fourth year.... They would constitute the *minima* with which every pupil must be familiar, using them correctly in speech and writing.

And still further back, in 1904, no less an authority than Professor Jespersen was experimenting with simplification. Discussing the choice of suitable reading material he wrote:

Such a splendid little story as Mrs. Ewing's *Jackanapes*, which is frequently read as it stands in German and Swedish Schools, is, according to my judgment,

too full of literary expressions and unnecessary words to be easily comprehended by our little pupils. In the passage which I have selected for my own primer, I have therefore in several places made considerable omissions, and the style has throughout been made more colloquial and direct, by means of corrections like these for instance:

*Having ceased to entertain* (given up) any hopes of his own recovery. . . .

Tony tumbled off *during the first revolution* (before he had gone round once).

And what bright eyes *peeped out of his dark forelock as it was blown by the wind!* (he had!)

If it had been *feasible* (possible) to leave off calling him Jackanapes and to get used to his *baptismal* (real Christian) name of Theodore it *would have been satisfactory* (she would have done it)

It is very probable that on comparing the original with the revised text it will be found that some of the colouring has been lost; I merely maintain that the pupils gain thereby. The more it is insisted upon (as according to the reform-method) that the selections are not only to be read but also to be mastered, so that their language becomes the mental property of the pupil, the more necessary is such revision.

It says much for Jespersen's vast knowledge and sure instinct in matters linguistic that, without having formulated any systematic theory of definition or having invented any scientific technique of elimination, he should even then have come so close to Basic English: out of the eleven examples of substitution that he quotes no less than eight are 'pure Basic'. The substitutions which

are not Basic are obviously the result not of hostility to simplification as such but of 'rule-of-thumb' methods.

In the same way I might show that all the most alert and most intellectually sensitive teachers have long been thinking along Basic lines. The very warmth with which the word-counting systems, imperfect as they are, were welcomed in itself shows how great was the desire for 'planning'.

From these systems, as we have seen, Basic differs not so much in kind as in degree. The idea of simplification is the same old idea. The difference lies in the *method* of simplification and the *scope* of simplification. What is new about Basic, arising from this difference of scope and method, is its completeness, its self-sufficiency and its utter simplicity not only of vocabulary but of grammar and idiom as well.

Nevertheless, because these things are so important, and because the claims based on them are so startling, the reaction to Basic in some quarters has been to regard it as something entirely new and revolutionary, both as a system and as a technique. I have said that change is the first law of life, but unfortunately not all persons, especially where their own most vital interests and cherished beliefs are concerned, are in this respect 'legally-minded', and bearing all this in mind we shall find it easier to understand why Basic, which exploits change and demands change, should have come in for a certain amount of criticism, and why most of that criticism should have originated in those quarters most immediately affected by its spread.

We have already seen the line of attack from the Esperanto side — Basic may be all right as a stepping-

stone to English, but as an international language its claims are 'completely illusory'.

But the word-counters cannot allow that; they have their own cherished stepping-stones to English, so what is more natural than that they should hand the unwanted baby back to the Esperantists with a 'not in our line, thank you'? How eagerly they hasten to assure the reader of their *Interim Vocabulary Report* (for it is they who had most to do with its making) that the *Report*

does not deal with what is sometimes called simplified English....It arises out of no desire to make English a *lingua franca* in the world by reducing it to a simplified or standardized form .....To borrow Dr. Ballard's phrase, it is concerned *with the simplification of teaching, not with the simplification of language.*

And so Basic finds a home in neither camp!

But this sort of criticism need not detain us very long. I have only to refer my readers back to the study in 'comparative simplification' on pp. 122 and 123. Is not the Oxford English Course *Merchant of Venice* based on simplification of language? Does it not reduce the number of different words from 10,000 to 2,000? Are not the New Method *Robinson Crusoe* and *Famous Fairy Stories* similarly written in simplified language? Did not Jespersen find it necessary to simplify his language? Does not *every* teacher, facing a class of beginners, simplify his language? How *can* teaching be simplified if not by a simplification of language? Who can resist the conclusion therefore that this 'crime' of Basic, which puts it so completely outside the pale of respectable first courses in English, lies not in its simplification, as

would appear, but rather in the *far greater success* of its simplification, and hence in its *far greater powers* to simplify teaching?

But it is good that the 'debt' to Dr. Ballard should have been acknowledged, because there have been numerous other 'borrowers' (in both camps) of the same (and other) phrases, which we are now enabled to trace back to their source.

How safely Dr. Ballard may be relied upon in questions of simplification may be judged from his introductory remarks, in his book *Thought and Language*, about Basic English. After describing the word-counting feats of Professor Thorndike in America he goes on:

The word-counting method has not been used in England, unless it is the means by which Mr. C. K. Ogden has selected his vocabulary for Basic English.

This was written in 1934. Dr. Ballard had not only read *The Meaning of Meaning*, but he begins a chapter in his own work with a reference to this "large and noteworthy book". Later he gives two pages to Dr. Richards' 'statement and suggestion' analysis of meaning. So he was not unaware of these researches. The method of Panoptic Conjugation itself was fully described, and the Chart was reproduced, in an article published in 1930.

*Basic English*, from which Dr. Ballard must have drawn the material on which he bases his inquiry, states quite clearly (on page 19) the means by which the vocabulary was selected:

The theorist will note (what the purely practical may safely ignore) that the five chief principles for which novelty may be claimed, in the sense

that their application has made so radical a reduction feasible, are:

the elimination of verbs,

the analysis of the ten main operators and twenty spatial directives which replace them in universal grammar,

the use of panoptic conjugation in systematic definition,

the projectional interpretation of emotive adjectives, and

the development of Bentham's Theory of Fictions in the treatment of metaphor.

And *Jeremy Bentham*, the book in which Mr. Ogden discusses Bentham's *Theory of Fictions*, was published in 1932.

If then, despite all this, Dr. Ballard can think for one moment that Basic is in any way related to word-counting, we can give a pretty shrewd guess as to the *thoroughness* with which he conducted his inquiry. And we shall find our guess more than justified when we read, again in *Thought and Language*:

It is assumed by Mr. Ogden that when the student of Basic English has learnt the meanings of the separate words in the Basic vocabulary he has learnt the meaning of their combination.... By what process of reasoning can a man who is quite conversant with the separate meanings of 'put', of 'up' and of 'with' ever infer that 'to put up with' means 'to endure'?

If, as Dr. Ballard suggests, Mr. Ogden *assumes* this why has he selected 250 necessary idioms, of which 'put up with' is one, and made them part of his system? Why are the 250 idioms taught as such in the *Basic Way* books? Why will no idiom outside the 250 be found in

any of the reading books written in Basic English? One of the features that makes Basic unique as a teaching instrument is this very simplification, or restriction, of idiom.

"Not only is the vocabulary simplified," says Dr. Ballard, "but the rules of grammar as well." If he knew about the simplification of grammar he must have known about the simplification of idiom. Why then did he ignore it?

The next criticism is that "just as the simplicity of the Basic Vocabulary is misleading so is the simplicity of the grammatical rules." In fact, "Mr. Ogden succeeds in getting his English simple at the expense of getting it wrong." But here, faced with the formidable task of proving that Basic English is wrong English, Dr. Ballard, after one very feeble attempt, loses heart and refers his readers (page 169) back to *A Critical Examination of Basic English*, by M. P. West, E. Swenson, and Others. I say 'back to' because its leading authors, West and Palmer, are the self-same people who acknowledged their debt to Dr. Ballard so charmingly in the *Interim Report*.

But since Dr. Ballard has in this way relieved himself of further responsibility let us now turn to the *Critical Examination* itself.

This remarkable document, published in 1934, was the outcome of more than two years' labour by Dr. West and his six collaborators, yet anyone familiar with the literature which it professed to examine could detect at a glance the grossest errors and misconceptions on every page; and the critical dogmas on which it is founded have long been abandoned by every linguist of repute.



Even before the appearance of *Counter-Offensive*, in which the criticism was answered line for line, almost word for word, the *Critical Examination* had been withdrawn by its authors, and all available copies have now been destroyed.

But one knows how a misquotation or a misprint may be copied for generations from the works of one 'expert' to another, without a verification of the reference, until the perversion becomes standard. Thus in addition to Dr. Ballard's own reference we have:

"Compare for a trenchant criticism of defects in Ogden's list Michael West's Bulletin 2"—Professor R. H. Fife in *Experiments and Studies in Modern Language Teaching* (Chicago, 1934).

"For a scientific and detailed criticism of the project, see *A Critical Examination of Basic English*"—leaflet published by the British Esperanto Association.

"The 850 word-list is still the same, but the criticism made by Dr. West and others, that the learning weight of the 850 words is equal to over 3,000 words, is not answered"—Mrs. Aiken, in *American Speech*, October 1934.

"The case against Basic English has been stated with remarkable thoroughness and insight by 'M. P. West, E. Swenson, and others—'" Mr. Ivan Bell, in *The Japan Chronicle*, May 16, 1935.

"For further examples (of Basic 'pidgin' English) see *A Critical Examination of Basic English*" etc.—Review in *Teaching*, Bombay, September, 1934.

"....but he (Mr. Ogden) employs in all 3,925 'learning-items', as is pointed out in the study referred to below (*Critical Examination* etc.)"—Thompson and Wyatt, *The Teaching of English in India*, Page 50.

"Table XI of *A Critical Examination of Basic English* provides other examples (of distorted English)"—F. G. French on *The Basic Way*, article in *Teaching*, Bombay, June 1938.

And so it goes on, as fine a study in the art of chain 'gloss' as one could wish to come across. Fortunately, however, one finds that most of the points sought to be made in the XXV Tables of the *Critical Examination* remain largely unexploited, perhaps because they are considered too risky, and the criticisms boil down to a few 'old-timers' cropping up again and again in various guises. I think therefore it will be sufficient if I deal with these, taking as my 'text' the latest 'rehash', namely, the article in *Teaching* by F. G. French.

Mr. French's criticisms divide into two groups. One is concerned with Basic English as such; the other with the *Basic Way to English Course*, consisting of four graded books in which the 850 words etc. are taught.

Let us turn first to the general criticisms.

## I. Basic Cheats

Mr. French says:

...it is worth noting that the vocabulary is not really very different in *learning-burden* from the vocabularies employed by West in *The*

*New Method*, Faucett in *The Oxford English Course* and Palmer in *Thousand-Word English*.

Then there follows the usual list of new formations, compounds, etc. "each of the value of a new word," e.g., 'nothing', 'everyone', 'outside', etc. That is to say, it is claimed that it would be just as easy to learn a totally new word (such as 'bow', 'serve' or 'visit') as to form those which the critic lists. The learner who has mastered 'no' and 'thing', and 'every' and 'one', and who already writes "no thing is the same to every one," will not be able to grasp "nothing is the same to everyone." If the professional teacher is unable to impart the two 'new words' with less difficulty than would be required for two *really* new words, there seems nothing for it but to encourage our unhappy infants to write their own textbooks.

But what Mr. French is implying is that if these new formations, developed items, extensions of meaning etc. are counted up, they will swell the Basic list to the total of 3,925 learning-items mentioned in the *Critical Examination*. So that apparently the grammatical simplification, omission of irregular verbs etc. in Basic is offset by the fact that the other vocabularies do *not* cheat: *Thousand-Word English*, we must understand, has only 1,000 learning-items; *The New Method* has only 1,400 learning-items, and so on.

But Palmer himself says, in his introduction to *Thousand-Word English*:

We first determined what sort of unit should be counted as a 'word', and decided that a given word should *include* its inflected forms, common derivatives, and the commonest 'semantic

varieties' (i.e., stretches of meaning and function).

And true enough when we look up the list we find, for example:

NO	<i>det. and adv. of degree</i>
none	<i>n. substitute</i>
nobody	<i>n. substitute</i>
no-one	<i>n. substitute</i>
nothing	<i>n. substitute</i>
nowhere	<i>adv.</i>
no more	<i>det. and adv.</i>

#### EVERY

everybody	<i>n. substitute</i>
everyone	<i>n. substitute</i>
everything	<i>n. substitute</i>
everywhere	<i>adv.</i>

GET	<i>v (most senses)</i>
(got)	<i>pret. and past ppl.</i>

So that under 'every' we have not one but *five* learning-items; under 'no' we have not one but *seven* learning-items; under 'get' we have 'got' and most of the expansions of meaning (the *Oxford Dictionary* lists more than a hundred).

The same is true of all other vocabularies. Basic counts its words therefore in exactly the same way as they do, which is, indeed, the only sensible way there is. So that if it is held to cheat it cheats in very good company.

Unlike the other vocabularies, however, Basic only permits those stretches of sense (as, for example, with a word like 'get') which are immediately intelligible to the foreigner from the context. Uses which are not likely to be intelligible are regarded as idioms, are listed as such in the *ABC of Basic English* and are taught as such in the *Basic Way* books. The entries under 'get', for example, in the *ABC* list of idioms are as follows:

## GET

1. He had no money because he *got a book out* last year.
2. His friends said they would *get a play up* for him.
3. They did not *get the letter off* before he was put out of his house.
4. He *got (himself) into bad ways* through drink.
5. He *got (himself) out of doing* any more work.

As we have seen, no other system has ever attempted to restrict idiom in this methodical way.

It is true that Mr. French decides not to labour this particular detail, but only because

we all know that two hundred or three hundred or five hundred words this way or that make very little difference to our task over a number of years.

That certainly seems to be the principle which has produced most of the scientific, objective simplifications which have come on the market since the appearance of Basic; and perhaps it is well that at least one of their proponents should be frank about it.

## 2. Strange Inclusions

The next criticism is that

the actual words included in the Basic vocabulary are of *an entirely different type* from those used in ordinary class books.

As examples of words of "an entirely different type" he takes, amongst others equally surprising, 'thumb' and 'part', which he regards as typically "unexpected" words to introduce to beginners. The *Basic Way* books not unnaturally start with the body and its parts, since most children come into the classroom with their bodies and can point to their most obvious parts. How unexpected, therefore, that anyone should include the *thumb* as one of the *parts* of the body in the second lesson! Nevertheless, this unexpectedness of 'thumb' is treated as a sign of perversity to indicate that *The Basic Way* uses a word-list which is by no means an ordinary selection.

To emphasize his point, Mr. French continues:

There are the most surprising inclusions for a beginner's course.

This time they are

words that one does not contemplate teaching to youngsters at the bottom of the school

and ten examples are given. These are all from the twenty or thirty in Book IV which enable the learner to be introduced to some sort of subject-matter less banal in content than the usual fairy-tales and stories which have so long kept intelligent young Indians at an infantile level while more fortunate children are at least occasionally being introduced to the world around them.

I need only deal with one example, because it is unprofitable to devote further space to a prejudice against treating children as reasonable beings. It is the more unnecessary because the critic himself singles out the prime offender as follows:

How are we to teach young pupils the musical meaning of the word 'harmony'—'a combination of musical notes not in unison but forming chords'?

One might as well ask how we are to teach young pupils the meaning of the word 'man'—'a plantigrade biped utilizing articulated symbols in phatic communication.' I have yet to find a teacher of music who has the slightest difficulty in teaching the meaning of 'harmony' to young learners. Amongst the thousand most notable errors in Dr. West's *New Method Dictionary* for Indian children was the following entry:

Key—"a set of musical notes which sound well when played together."

That is to say, a *chord*; and any such "group of notes sounding well when played together" is then referred to as in harmony. Is this really more abstruse than the fact that any group of young learners sounding happy when playing together are said to be in harmony?

The jest, however, lies not in the alleged incapacity of the teacher to convey the obvious, but in the fact that the musical sense of harmony ('sweet sound') is deliberately *excluded* from the learner's course as unnecessary. The word is taught on page 77 of *Basic Way Book IV*, in the last lesson but two of the course, thus:

In harmony = in complete agreement.

Men living in complete agreement may also be said to be living 'in harmony'. Thereafter, when men or things seem to be 'in complete agreement', the learner will remember that they are likely to be 'in harmony'. That is all, and it seems more than sufficient to dispose of the critic's objection. 'How easily 'strange inclusions' of this kind may in fact be taught, in the proper context, may be seen by the way they are introduced in the *Basic Way* books.

### 3. Strange Omissions

When a short list of words is given special prominence as a Table, with the heading

#### **Words Omitted From The 'Basic Way' Books**

the reader might expect *not* to find such words in the Basic vocabulary.

But we have learnt that careless critics often inadvertently make a *little change*, and sure enough the words *little* and *change*, which Mr. French asserts are among the essentials which the teacher will want to use and will not find, are in fact Basic words. The critic's careful study of *The Basic Way* has not led him to consult even the Index, where the learner is referred to Book II, Lesson 17, for 'little', and to Book III, Lesson 10, for 'change', amongst other places where they occur.

As Mr. French says that this list of omissions is worth careful study, let us continue our researches. We find in it abundant cause to congratulate the inventors of the Basic vocabulary on their exclusions, for, amongst



other oddities, it contains such 'indispensables' as *whole*, *city*, *receive*, and *glad*, which, we are asked to believe, are absolutely vital in *any* First Step.

The non-Basic pupil is apparently forced to say:

The *whole city* was *glad* to *receive* it.

The Basic pupil says, in exactly the same number of words:

*All the town* was *pleased* to *get* it.

So, as Mr. French adds with unconscious humour,

the practical teacher will not think much of the argument that each of these words (*whole*, *city*, *glad*, *receive*) can be avoided by a circumlocution, and that in the *Basic Way* books circumlocutions are used instead of them.

Since there are no circumlocutions, this is not surprising.

Mr. French further reveals that these four words (*whole*, *city*, *glad* and *receive*) are among

the three hundred most used and most useful words in English

and in the three hundred he also includes *big* and *large* (and presumably *great*), *find* and *found*, *carry* and *bring* (but not *brought*), *want* and *wish*, and idiomatic extras like *ease* and *serve*, which Dewey has excluded from the first 1000. How does Mr. French arrive at his three hundred words? By a careless substitution of three hundred for three thousand? But the figure is repeated, so we can only ask: Why are three words so nearly synonymous as *great*, *big* and *large* regarded as more 'useful' than *face*, or *girl*, or *keep* (which do not appear

in Dewey's first 300), unless the object is to retard the Indian learner?

What words are useful depends entirely on the purpose in view, and Mr. French naively assumes that current methods of answering this question are final. But what is the result of the sort of teaching which Mr. French condones or advocates for India? We have only to turn to the pages of the same issue of *Teaching* in which his article appeared to find the answer:

Not having learnt how to read, the writers are without the power of discrimination. So the trivial and the really important are mixed up together. (D. S. Gordon, page 165.)

And again:

Our schools and colleges. . . . do not teach us how to read or write or to take account of our surroundings for personal purposes. . . . Schools give us books that we may with their help pass an examination creditably. . . . The satisfaction of self-expression in writing as an art or even in play we have never known. . . . What other self-respecting book-shelf would keep such trash as our men collect during their stay at the university? . . . We are becoming at least aware of the serious defects in our system of education. (M. G. Singh, page 169.)

Lastly we come to a specific and easily verifiable accusation of omission. In the *Basic Way* books the idiom 'there is' is carefully introduced in an appropriate place, namely page 9 of Book IV, in the sentence "There is a dirty mark on the glove." It is specially italicized because it is introduced there for the first time. There is a special note for the teacher on the opposite page: \*

There is a dirty mark on the glove = a dirty mark is (there) on the glove. This is a very common form of assertion in English."

Mr. French, however, cannot find it. So he says:

An omission which is very difficult to explain. (doubtless it is due to some point in the *Basic Way* idiom which has escaped me) is the total avoidance of the very useful English idiom 'There are' (four books on the table). In *The Basic Way* the meaning of 'there' is confined to the opposite of 'here', and the ordinary idiom is not utilized.

The neutral observer may well gasp, for not only is this idiom introduced (and indexed, like all such second uses of a word, as the second use of 'there') but it is frequently repeated. It occurs twice more on page 9; there is an exercise on it (page 10); and it is repeated on pages 15, 19, 23, 29, 33, 37, 39, 41, 57, 59, 65, 77, 83, 85, in singular and plural, throughout an entire Book, so that the learner may be familiarized with it in every form. There is probably no idiom in *The Basic Way* which occurs more frequently! Such an omission must, in the nature of things, be *very* difficult to explain.

#### 4. Strange Idiom

Because of these strange omissions, says Mr. French, *Basic* has to resort to circumlocutions. One such 'circumlocution' we have already dealt with, namely:

For: *The whole city was glad to receive it.*

*Basic* says: *All the town was pleased to get it.*

Now let us examine some of the others.

According to Mr. French some of the ridiculous circumlocutions *actually to be found* in *The Basic Way* are:

- |                       |                             |                             |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Stand!                | —                           | Get on your legs!           |
| Those weeds are kill- | Those weeds are putting his |                             |
| ing his crops.        | —                           | crops to death.             |
| Ask him the time.     | —                           | Put to him a question about |
|                       |                             | the time.                   |
| Try to find it.       | —                           | Make the attempt to make    |
|                       |                             | the discovery of it.        |

“These examples,” he says, “make a cautious teacher doubtful as to the advisability of trusting to *The Basic Way* in the matter of vocabulary.”

Apart from the fact that Mr. French does not even trouble to confine himself to the words in the Basic list (*e.g.* ‘weeds’ and ‘crops’ are not Basic) hundreds of teachers using the *Basic Way* books know of course that such circumlocutions are *nowhere* to be found either in the learning books or in the Basic literature.

How, then, does Mr. French arrive at them? By substituting equivalents, taken from *The Basic Dictionary*, for single words, despite the warning given in the introduction that “direct substitution is not intended and must frequently be avoided.” *The Basic Dictionary* must not be confused with the *General Basic English Dictionary* for school use which is now being prepared; it has no connection of any sort with *The Basic Way* and is of very little use for class teaching, as is made clear in the introduction. Actually it consists of short hints, averaging half a line each, on about 7,000 words, *for English writers who are engaged in the translation*

of *Standard English* into *Basic*, and who have therefore already made a detailed study of the system.

The entry under 'stand', for example, in its root sense, is as follows:

Stand: Get on feet (legs); get up; be upright.

If we are talking of a cripple or an animal we may prefer 'He got on his legs' or 'The horse got on its legs' for the more usual *feet*. So 'legs' appears in *brackets*, as a reminder to the translator. But anyone using the *Basic Way* course would normally no more think of saying 'Get on your legs' than he would think of saying 'Be upright'. He would say—as the Englishman most naturally says—'Get up!' No occasion for saying 'Get on your legs' occurs in the *Basic Way* books. And yet Mr. French asserts that

Stand, in *The Basic Way*, is expressed by the circumlocution 'Get on your legs.'

In the same way we find in the *Dictionary*

try, s — attempt, etc. 1

find, v. — make the discovery, etc.

But for 'try to find it' the Basic pupil will say, in good idiomatic English, 'Have a look for it' or 'See where it is', and not, as Mr. French absurdly asserts, 'Make the attempt to make the discovery of it.'

Mr. French claims to have made a "careful and detailed study" of the Basic books, but not one of the "examples" quoted is to be found in them. For "other examples", like Dr. Ballard, he refers the reader to Table XI of the *Critical Examination of Basic English*.

So to the *Critical Examination* we had better return. The Table referred to contains 79 phrases from

six of the Basic books. All these snippets are taken *out of their context* — which for more than 50 per cent of them would remove the apparent ground of objection completely. Of the rest, many are gratuitous errors, such as the assumption that ‘to do music’ means ‘to play’, or that ‘one time’ (from a Southern darkie story) is the Basic equivalent for ‘once’; others, such as ‘Richard’s black uncombed ball of hair came to the window’, are criticisms of a Standard English original; others again, *e.g.*, ‘the reason for him not coming’, are criticisms of standard usage, admitted by most modern authorities. The small percentage of deviations from the normal to which objection might be taken, *e.g.* ‘washing things’ (for ‘toilet articles’), are the necessary consequences of any sort of simplification even with a vocabulary three times the size of Basic. Not a single legitimate charge of incorrectness emerges from the entire table.

The *Critical Examination* itself, to which Mr. French so blithely refers his readers, was, as I have mentioned, subsequently *withdrawn by its authors and destroyed*.

Finally, apparently to strengthen the impression that such ridiculous circumlocutions are in fact to be found in the Basic books, Mr. French cites, first, a passage from the book called *Basic English*.

cf. *Basic English*, p. 82: ‘the real strength of Basic lies in the fact that it can avoid all appeals to authority.’

The implication clearly is that the fictitious “examples” of Basic circumlocutions which he quotes would be justified by the inventors of Basic English on the grounds that Basic chooses to disregard the conventions of current usage.

Actually this sentence is taken from a discussion of the relative positions of Basic English and Esperanto *a propos* the appeal of Esperantists to some "authoritative central institution" on questions of terminology. The Basic reply to the Esperantists is that *current standards of idiomatic communication are sufficient authority for its purposes*, and that for Basic any scientific technicality becomes 'international' when the science in question uses it internationally. Therefore no appeal to a Committee is necessary. In other words, *Basic can safely accept the authority of current usage*. This Mr. French converts into a *denial* of any such standard.

Secondly, by way of *proving* that the method is "strange in idiom," Mr. French quotes a sentence from a Basic 'background' book which says:

A Turn or a Twist will get any Thought into it (Basic) without Trouble, even to the untrained."

From this sentence the capitals have been removed, since it is taken from a *memoria technica* — an alphabetical puzzle in which the 600 Basic nouns are introduced in alphabetical order. It occurs in *Brighter Basic*, a *jeu d'esprit* designed to test the intelligibility of certain idioms excluded from Basic English as such. *Brighter Basic* is specially listed as "not for teachers"!

Of all the criticisms of Basic this is the one which is most often repeated — that Basic is 'queer'. In the book by Thompson and Wyatt (page 50), for example, we read

the circumlocutions that have to be resorted to...end in the production of a language... which is quite unintelligible to the average English-speaking person."

We have seen how the circumlocutions are 'manufactured' and why they *have* to be 'manufactured'—because they are nowhere to be found in the Basic books. Mr. French must know this, and since his article is a reply to one I had written for the previous issue of *Teaching* he must have known also of the leader in the *London Times*, which I quoted, and which concludes with the words:

For their own sake, as well as that of foreign learners, English-speaking people would do well to keep their own English as near as possible to the *simplicity* and *precision* of Basic English.

In my article I had pointed out that the subject of this leader was an article in the same issue (written by a staff-member) in which occurs the following passage:

In England itself books have been written in Basic English without readers being aware of it. *Twentieth-Century Houses*, an illustrated architectural work by Mr. Raymond McGrath, is a noteworthy example which won high praise in both the architectural and literary Press, and which showed that even on a somewhat specialized subject the author was able to write from among only 850 different words a book of 80,000 words.

Then I quoted some examples of the high praise bestowed on this particular book:

From *The Spectator*:

Here is a book which, if virtue were not its own reward, should most certainly be given two reviews—in parallel columns. For it is not only the best book on its subject but it is written in Basic English and written beautifully.



From *The Architects' Journal*:

Basic English, handled by Mr. McGrath, is flexible, fluid and alive. *Twentieth-Century Houses* is a literary and technical land-mark.

These reviewers, apparently, did *not* find Basic English unintelligible!

So much for the bogey of circumlocutions, and if this were not enough, one would have only to mention that writers like Bernard Shaw, Wells, Haldane, and Wickham Steed are not only among the supporters of Basic, but have actually encouraged the translation of their works into Basic, that men like the Rev. Edwin Smith have collaborated in the translation of the Bible into Basic, and that all the world over university professors and leaders of thought have expressed their admiration and astonishment at the flexibility and naturalness of Basic prose. Two Basic books (*Gulliver's Travels* and Shaw's *Arms and the Man*) have been prescribed by the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate as texts for its 1939 examinations. Messrs. West and French and Thompson and Wyatt are alone in insisting, in the face of all this, that Basic is *unnatural* and *unintelligible*.

## 5. Strange Grammar

Mr. French says he has

experienced the greatest difficulty in unravelling the grammar of *The Basic Way*.

He has "counted from beginning to end of all four books" for what he calls "continuous presents" of the form "I am giving," "I am writing."

The Basic technique in this matter is clear and effective. Certain words ending in *-ing* such as *hearing*, *reading*, *waiting*, *writing*, are in the vocabulary. These are introduced in Books II and III of *The Basic Way* in sentences like 'The frame is *hanging* from a nail', which merely illustrates the simple sense of the word *hanging*. The *-ing* forms of all the operators, *putting*, *taking*, etc. are introduced at the beginning of Book IV, and the other *-ing* formations, such as 'a person walking on wet earth' or 'some of them are firing' come in after them (as simple *adjectives* behaving in the same way).

Every such use is fully explained as it comes in, though the technique is so straightforward that many teachers find it requires no explanation. Why the fuss then? Because Basic, for the sake of simplicity, does not call them tenses!

In the same way Mr. French finds that "abstract nouns and gerunds" are freely employed in Basic, "though usually left until the pupil is much more mature." Words like *reading*, *writing*, *drawing*, and *colour* appear in the earliest lessons of all courses, but it is wrong, says Mr. French, to teach 'writing is not hard' till the pupil is 'mature'.

Why? Because *writing*, in the orthodox grammar, is called a gerund!

Basic points out that *writing* (which is not formed from a verb for the Basic learner) is best regarded not as a gerund but as an ordinary descriptive noun. If the child can 'do music' in one class he can 'do writing' in another, and then the mystery of gerunds and the difficulty of teaching on commonsense lines both

vanish — together with the grammarian's old-fashioned objection!

## 6. Analogical Aberrations

The teacher is then asked to believe that because the *uses* of the operator “are not defined in the *Basic Way* books” it is “left to the whim of the learner” to employ whichever seems to fit the case.

“Grammatical habits,” we are told, “both good and bad, are formed out of school as frequently as in it.”

Thus *Basic* is made responsible in a beginner's course for any irregularity due to irregularities of the English language which may cause the pupils to make errors if they attempt to form sentences by analogy *out of school*, sentences to which they have *not* been introduced in the course. In other words, it is even made responsible for imaginary errors such as ‘he came a slip’, formed out of school on the analogy of ‘he made a slip’.

Although the pupil has only learnt or seen the operator *come* followed by a directive such as *to* and *from* we can be quite certain, says Mr. French, that he will exercise his private judgment and ‘come a slip’. And so the wise teacher “when, in the privacy of the home, he is considering the adoption of the *Basic Way* books” will reject them in favour of some parrot-method course which makes no attempt whatever to cope with irregularities, and which cannot possibly guard the pupil against the majority of the pitfalls which *The Basic Way* is at such pains to eliminate.

Why the wise teacher should reject them *in the privacy of his home* (unwise though such a decision would be on such slender evidence) is not obvious. But

“the less careful teacher”, if he adopts them, will realize his error at the end of a year. To make this clear a quotation is provided from *The ABC of Basic English*, which says: “The parallels in normal English for the Basic words are of little value to anyone who has not a knowledge of English.” This was written to inform the reader that though the equivalents of the 850 words given in *The Basic Dictionary* are designed to let anyone with a knowledge of English see their value *they are not intended for learners who know no English at all*. This aside is totally irrelevant for the critic’s purpose, but the teacher is encouraged thereby to suppose that it can be regarded as some sort of admission or condemnation.

Proceeding, then, we read:

Pitfalls for the pupil abound in these books. On p. 83 of Book III, for example, we have

*The horse will give the cart a pull.*

It is extremely probable that in the plural the pupil will write

*The horses will give the carts the pulls.*

Why should Mr. French regard ‘the pulls’ as the plural of ‘a pull’? The Basic learner, at any rate, knows that it is not. If there is only one cart why pluralize it, and if there are really two carts, why is ‘cart’ not correctly pluralized as ‘carts’? If there are not two carts, Basic is hardly to blame; and only omniscience can tell us, without a context, what “in the plural” may mean. Even with *the horse will pull the cart* the same problem will confront the learner.

It is hardly necessary to deal with the even more ridiculous accusation of traps in the muddled account

which Mr. French gives of 'verb-elimination'. Apart from the old-timers like 'sticked' and 'drawed' none emerge, and, as usual, Mr. French has overlooked the fact that 'draw' is not a Basic word. Incidentally, again, he fails to count correctly. "There are," he says, "no less than 246 words which are in fact normally used as verbs but which may not be so used except participially or passively." As everyone who has given even an hour's attention to the list knows, there are precisely 300 nouns which take the *-er*, *-ing*, *-ed* endings. That such a blunder could arise, irrelevant though it is to the criticism, can only be due to extreme carelessness or extreme ignorance.

Nor should it be necessary to insist that *no* English Course for beginners can be imagined which will allow the learner to exercise his private judgment in recombining words freely. In Chapter 5 I gave instances of the deceptive simplicity of some introductory courses and quoted a complete lesson consisting of the words:

Stand up, please!

Bow!

Sit down, please!

If, as Mr. French has told us, half their grammatical habits are formed out of school by precocious little pupils, and if 'stand' means what it seems to, how will the learner gather that *up* and *please* are not an arbitrary or invariable accompaniment of 'stand'? Outside the classroom he and his little playmates may get together and prattle to one another, as grammatical enthusiasts will:

You are standing up please on my toe

says one whose whim it is to employ only the phrases the teacher has used. "This is a bow-down, is it not?" asks another, who elects to recombine words which the teacher has put at his disposal.

Only in the case of Basic, apparently, are these habits dangerous, in spite of the fact that in Basic such opportunities are reduced to an absolute minimum in view of the unusual simplicity of the material used.

Finally Mr. French complains that the word *correct* is not in the Basic vocabulary. "That," he says "is at once a symbol and an omen." Basic English might welcome the indictment in the sense that the school-master's idea of Correct English is already a standard joke in the English music halls. "These are pens, are they not?" asks the teacher in the *Oxford English Course* (Language Book I, p. 20) recommended by Mr. French. That is 'correct', no doubt, but if Indian children go about posing questions in this form, their English friends may well ask: "These are little pedants, aren't they?"

There must, if one may judge from the existing courses referred to by Mr. French, be deviations from current usage in the earliest stages of learning, but in *The Basic Way* such first approximations are quickly adjusted, as the learner gains in vocabulary and experience; and at no point in the course could a word like *ngme* be presented in such a model *Oxford English Course* sentence as "Tell me the names of the countries included in the name south-east Asia." (Book III, p. 21). In *the Basic Way* names are not included in other names, even if its English is not up to French standards of correctness.

## 7. Special Training

The introduction to *The Basic Way* states that the 850 words "used with the Basic rules, make it possible to say anything at the level of everyday talk in natural English", so that the learner "can discuss business and industrial organization," etc. In Mr. French's article this becomes, "will be able to discuss in English, *with any other English speakers*, business and industry," etc. Such questions are discussed in a great variety of books by Professor J. B. S. Haldane, Dr. I. A. Richards, and others; but by adding "with any other English speakers" Mr. French makes it seem that *all (or any) other English speakers* will also have to talk in Basic for the claim to be other than "not credible".

In *The Basic Way* the words are naturally used with the Basic rules or they could not be used at all. No other book is necessary, since the course is offered as complete in itself. But Mr. French says:

These devices are to be used according to 'The Basic Rules'....Those rules are not given in this series of class-books. They and their applications must be studied in the following....

Then there is a list, from which it might be inferred that *The Basic Way* is not a complete course, and that these further books in the list are preliminary to it. From which it follows, according to Mr. French, that *The Basic Way* cannot be used by teachers who have not had special training:

The author does not expect his miracles to be performed by any teacher unacquainted with the necessary technique.

Now I have already discussed Basic from the teacher's point of view (pp. 141-144) so this point need not keep us long.

Obviously when Mr. French asserts that "the practical teacher cannot imagine himself conducting lessons comprehended by his pupils if he is not allowed to use" words like *course*, *reach*, *serve*, *set*, *several*, *stay* and *visit*, he forgets that most of these words do not come into the earlier stages of any of the simplified courses which he contrasts with Basic; he forgets that teachers using those courses are almost always forbidden to deviate from the wording; and he forgets that it is generally accepted that no teacher who uses a simplified vocabulary for class purposes need *improvise* in that vocabulary.

All I want to say here is that one could forgive the critic for overlooking the simple little fact that Basic, in respect of its teaching, is in exactly the same position as any other introductory course. But when he suggests that the *author himself* expects the teacher to undergo special training one begins to wonder...!

No evidence is offered for the statement. It is contradicted by implication throughout, and there is nowhere any suggestion that any teacher should use or study any publication other than *The Basic Way* itself. The Basic rules are the ordinary rules of English grammar — simplified for introductory purposes. Most teachers are sufficiently interested in their work to want to know *what has been eliminated* — and why. But providing they stick to the book there is no need for them to find out; all they have to do is to teach *what is there*.



We come now to Mr. French's criticism of the *Basic Way* books.

### The Basic Way to English

This, again, is largely an echo of the *Critical Examination*, which refuses to recognize those responsible for Basic as "persons who have had long and practical experience in teaching English." This in spite of the fact that Dr. West had himself written to the Orthological Institute from India, in 1929, to express his thanks for the current number of *Psyche*, "and the very illuminating discussion which it contains of the problems of language-teaching. If I may say so," he continues, "I know no better general review of the problem as a whole and of the various attempts at solving it." Nevertheless the *Critical Examination* was sent out to do its worst, and the Campbell Committee, for example, after recommending Basic as a 'sound foundation', was constrained to add in a footnote:

After this Report had been adopted the Chairman received a copy of a Research Report named *A Critical Examination of Basic English*. . . . According to this Bulletin, Basic English cannot be accepted as a satisfactory system for school purposes.

This is the 'reservation' to which I referred on page 53. It is only since the Report was published (1936) that the *Basic Way* books have been made available, and whether those responsible for them would be likely to foist an unsatisfactory system on the non-English-speaking world I shall leave it to my readers to judge.

## I. The 'Author'

Mr. French is apparently so concerned lest their names should inspire a misplaced confidence that he consistently refrains from mentioning them. Although he is actually reviewing the *Basic Way* books he constantly refers to *the author*, as *one* ignorant of class-teaching and lacking in professional competence, in spite of the fact that my article in the previous issue of *Teaching*, to which he is replying, gave the *full list of authors* responsible for the *Basic Way* books. They are

Dr. W. B. Mumford, Colonial Adviser, University of London, Institute of Education.

Mr. H. V. Hampton, Principal Training College, Bombay.

Mr. E. H. Carter, Formerly H. M. Inspector, Board of Education.

Professor R. D. Jameson, National Tsing Hua University, Peiping, China.

Major Harvey Williams, Lecturer in English, Egyptian University, Cairo.

Mr. Harley V. Usill (General Editor, "The Year Book of Education")

The Teaching Books are specifically stated on the title pages to be the work of Dr. Mumford and Mr. Parker of the Institute of Education. The series is edited by Mr. C. K. Ogden, of Magdalene College, Cambridge, the linguist and psychologist chiefly responsible for the research which made the development of Basic English possible, and his co-operation is a guarantee that the educational applications are in accordance with the principles of the system.

Mr. French is not, therefore, as might be supposed, setting *one* author's opinion against another (his own); he is challenging a considered presentation of a

system recommended by a *body* of experienced teachers and educationists, many of whom have long been successfully using the method which they here advocate as the *first step* to learning English.

## 2. Never

I emphasize the *first step* because Mr. French discusses the Basic course as if it were offered everywhere and at all times as a complete English course in itself. The full title of the Books, given on every cover and title page, is *The Basic Way to English*. Obviously it cannot be *The Basic Way to Basic*. But Mr. French, referring to the 'strange omissions' described above, says,

Pupils using the *Basic Way* books will *never* see them, *never* hear them, *never* write them, *never* know them.

The article to which he is replying makes the place of Basic in the school curriculum quite clear. In the second paragraph reference is made to it as 'the most scientific *introduction* to normal English yet devised'. *The Basic Way* is the Basic way to *English* for those who are going on to English in its full form. If it so happens that they do not wish or are unable to go further they will nevertheless have command of an English, natural and adequate, complete in itself for all the purposes of everyday life. They will be able to discuss any problem in this language *with anyone who has been given the same minimum training*. They will be understood in any part of the world where English is spoken, though of course they will only understand anyone who

makes use of a larger vocabulary *if* they extend their vocabulary accordingly.

In this respect the Basic learner is in exactly the same position as learners who have taken any other first step, except that no other first step will give the learner an English so natural and so adequate for all the purposes of everyday life.

Is it suggested that learners of the *Oxford English Course*, or the *New Method Readers*, or *Thousand-Word English*, which are all being used as first steps, will never need or see any word which does not occur in these books?

Mr. French returns later to these omissions from the Basic list as a final and apparently unanswerable objection to the adoption of Basic. From an examination paper (details not given) containing 83 words he eliminates 32 which are not Basic, and then goes on:

It is quite clear that unless all examiners will promise to use nothing but the *Basic Way* books as their guide in wording examination questions, *Basic Way* pupils will be hopelessly handicapped at all examinations. Even if examiners make such a promise — an entirely unlikely event! — they must also promise to accept as ‘correct English’ the peculiar *Basic Way* idiom in which such pupils will express their answers.

The argument implies that somewhere at some time some ordinary examination paper has been written in a simplified vocabulary. The fact is that all first steps at present involve a further extension of vocabulary before the ‘ordinary’ examination stage is reached. If the same test is applied to the

other courses mentioned many of the words used in the examination paper (*e. g.*, 'blocks', 'pave', 'require', 'injure' etc.) will similarly be found wanting. And as the *Basic Way* course need take only a third of the time usually devoted to these other courses the Basic pupil will in fact have far more time for 'expansion' before the examination level is reached than a pupil of one of these courses.

But Mr. French's conclusion is:

As *The Basic Way* will ensure that my pupils will fail at all examinations (because they do not know all the words) I dare not use it in my classes.

### 3. No Practice

Next comes the extraordinary charge that "the absence of active work destroys the usefulness of the books as teaching instruments".

No opportunity whatever is given for the pupil to use the Basic vocabulary and idiom actively for free self-expression.

Actually no less than five kinds of Exercises are provided in four short, six-anna, beginner's text-books, supplemented by Graded Readers and Teaching Books.

The introduction to Teaching Book I states:

Learners should not be allowed to forget what they have once learnt. Words and phrases learnt in earlier steps should be used freely for the making of additional examples to help in the mastery of new difficulties. Every sixth step in Books I, II and III provides a revision of the matter contained in the preceding steps.

But it cannot be too often emphasized that Basic is an entirely new approach to language-learning and teaching in which the three stages (learning, practice and expansion) are closely interrelated. In the complete English course each is dependent on the others; each is essential to the plan as a whole. Thus *because* the learning stage is a preliminary to the one-level practice period, there is no need for additional exercises of types different from those provided by the books.

Such additional exercises would be a waste of time, because freedom of expression comes much more easily, naturally and usefully in the next stage, the free-reading or one-level practice stage. The *Basic Way* books are only an *artificial* preparation for a period of *natural* practice such as the *English* child gets in *his* reading. They aim at the utmost rapidity of progress in the *learning* of the word and sentence patterns. *Practice* with the patterns, aiming at free self-expression, will come later. Mr. French, writing on *The Basic Way*, has again failed to take the 'way' into account.

Why, with other systems, has it been found necessary to provide, in addition to the Readers themselves, language (grammar and composition) books, companions, primers and what not? Because these systems are so complicated, so difficult, so inconsistent in aim and method, that one series of books is not sufficient to achieve the desired object. The comprehensiveness of the Basic books, embracing as they do all the various aspects of English teaching—speaking, reading, writing, grammar and composition—is one of the great advantages deriving

from the simplicity of Basic and the use of Basic as a first step.

Such comprehensiveness has long been the ideal of the educationist. Champion, for example, after laying down an 'ideal' system of English teaching, goes on to say,

Instead of separate texts for teaching the use of English reading, grammar and composition, only one text would be required. In practice, however, these requirements have not been fulfilled....

Yet Mr. French thinks it his duty to point out, as a great fault, that the *Basic Way* books are 'all-in-all' and nothing else is provided!

#### 4. Bad Grading

Of the four Teaching Books which accompany the *Basic Way* books and which were prepared by Dr. Mumford and Mr. Parker of the Institute of Education, London University, Mr. French says:

These authors are *distressingly ignorant* of practical teaching, the grading is *hopelessly at fault*, the instructions *often worse than useless because they are misleading*, and they show *a failure to understand the real conditions and difficulties* of the classroom.

How does Mr. French proceed to prove that the grading is hopelessly at fault? He says:

In Teacher's Book III, p. 46, the author foresees that some of the pupils will be very young. He writes: 'If the learners have not learnt number in their own language, use familiar things such as large seeds, matches....'

strokes on the black board', and he makes suggestions for a very simple arithmetic lesson in counting one, two, three. But only a few pages previously he has set these Test Questions for the pupil to answer:

Is the distance between the middle point and the edge of the left circle equal to the distance between the middle point and the edge of the right circle?

What does the minute hand do in an hour?

Obviously, if the books are to be used by pupils who have not yet learned to count, such questions are absurdly difficult.

From this account one would naturally assume that the two Test Questions quoted are continuous and that *both* are asked by the teacher *before* he has given the lesson in counting.

Actually the first one, about size and distance, is taken from page 35, and the second one comes from page 47. On one of the 12 pages dividing the two questions is the note about number which, Mr. French says, *comes after both of them!*

Neither question, however, really demands a knowledge of number. The answer to the first one, about the two circles, is given in the key, quite simply, as *No, it is not*. And the answer to the second is given as *It goes completely round the clock*. In both cases the question and answer are, of course, based on the previous lesson. Is this *absurdly* difficult? Thus does Mr. French reveal the 'distressing ignorance' of 'the author'.

But the chief reason for condemning Dr. Mumford's instructions on the Teacher's pages as "worse



than useless, because they are misleading" is as follows:

On page 16 (of Book I) it is stated that *the* indicates a special one of a group, but....

*The lion is a fierce animal.*

The sneer, the italics, the dots... all suggest that this knock-out blow, the discovery of a 'generic' *the* actually used in *The Basic Way*, was a feat of real linguistic acumen. But — again the sentence is one of the critic's own making. Apart from the fact that neither *lion* nor *fierce* appear in the Basic vocabulary such a sentence could not possibly occur in a Basic Teaching Book for beginners, because the Basic learner is only taught the commonsense plural form of such statements ("Dogs are," etc.)

In fact, as I have shown (Page 115), this use of the generic *the* was deliberately excluded from *The Basic Way* in order to make the learning and use of *a* and *the* a possibility for all. Why pester the beginner at the outset with names which get him nowhere? After all, he is learning from *The Basic Way*, not from a jumble of grammatical possibilities which can be assumed to include everything Mr. French happens to know.

The other examples involving *a* and *the* can be disposed of by a reference to the pages from which they are cited. They are all straightforward applications of the instructions given, which the critic has failed to read with sufficient care, since he claims that such matters cannot be dealt with in an elementary course.

Only those who claim omniscience would fail to consult the books they criticize, and the failure of this particular critic may be due to some such assumption. He

has apparently never even read the other courses which he recommends. Here, for example, is Dr. West on *a* and *the*:

The correct use of 'a' and 'the' will only come gradually, but it will never come at all *unless care is taken from the very beginning*.

And here is Mr. French dismissing the care taken at the very beginning in *The Basic Way*:

In actual practice these difficulties are overcome by custom and *an absence of explanation*. The author reveals an ignorance of class conditions in attempting to teach directly the more abstruse aspects of *a* and *the* to young beginners.

And in the same way we find that:

Whenever some simple explanation is given in *The Basic Way*, Mr. French declares that the difficulty "is overcome by custom and an absence of explanation."

Whatever is *not* explained, where the old books happen to explain it, is "left to the whim of the learner."

When some simple use is introduced *early*, its introduction "reveals an ignorance of class conditions."

When the irregular third person singular is deferred, on sound grading principles, till the regular forms have been mastered, it is "fundamentally unsound to suppress so common a form" — because the learner will acquire bad habits *out of school*.

Mr. French makes a special point of the possessive *-s*. This form of the orthodox genitive is not of much importance in a well-graded first step, but when the critic finds four questions on it in an exercise on page 23 of

Book IV, he says: "Only *one* mention of this, in Book IV, Exercise 5a."

Why *mention*? It is introduced twice on the previous page, and twice more in the lesson itself. An explanation is given in the Teacher's notes on page 20 with the instructions: "Explain that the -'s form is the commonest form of possessive for persons and animals. Compare *he, his*, etc." Thereafter, over some sixty pages, it is used freely whenever required, so that the learner may get plenty of practice. Yet we are led to suppose that it is casually 'mentioned' once.

## 5. Two Years

Mr. French is annoyed by the suggestion that anyone working quickly with *The Basic Way* can learn 850 words and their uses in six months. There is abundant evidence to show that this is an understatement; yet to claim that after *two years* the learner will be able to discuss any question of general interest is "an affront to those whom the authors wish to attract, because it flouts and derides their experience." It is just 'not credible' to anyone who approaches Basic in the spirit of the current textbooks, and 'not credible' for the critic means that he proposes to condemn in terms of those textbooks whatever might make it seem credible:

The teaching of English entails careful preparation, much toilsome correction of errors and many disappointments. Our difficulties do not lie in separate words but in common errors where the pupil stumbles over the whole construction, not over the words; *e.g.* 'I replied him that I do not know where is the post office'.

I think I have said enough about the Basic principle of 'one thing at a time' to make any reply to

this needless. Indeed I might, had I thought of it, have used this very sentence to illustrate my point. But what can one expect from a critic who can argue that because walking is tiring flying must be impossible?

For such is his argument when he says that Basic English cannot be simple because the English language *as such* is difficult. "The difficulties of English, we must believe, are not likely to be disposed of so easily," and he quotes a footnote as proof that "In spite of its comparatively simple grammatical structure English is not an easy language to learn." The argument for Basic English is that English as such, and as usually taught, is difficult, *so* difficult in fact that without drastic simplification it is impossible to provide a good teaching method. Mr. French merely replies: "I can refute this because — English is a difficult language."

## Conclusion

In this reply to Mr. French, and to the authorities on whom he relies, I have made no statement which cannot be checked by reference to the books mentioned, and I sincerely hope that every teacher, for his own sake and that of his pupils, will make such a check before he finally defines his attitude to Basic.

## CHAPTER 20

### THE FUTURE OF BASIC

One criticism of Basic I have reserved till the last, because the answer to it takes us into the misty realms of speculation with which, as practical teachers, we are not really concerned.

We are back again with Dr. Ballard. He has been talking about the natural simplification of English 'that has been going on slowly and steadily throughout the ages'. He has no doubt, he says, that the process can be speeded up, 'but not by ignoring the forces of nature. To formulate a fixed system is like nailing up a weather-cock to keep the wind in the west'.

Basic, of course, is the 'weather-cock'; the natural trend towards simplicity is 'the wind in the west'. A crushing criticism! But what does it mean? If the natural trend is *always* towards simplicity, then, 'to borrow Dr. Ballard's phrase', the wind is *always* in the west. If the wind is *always* in the west it will itself keep the weather-cock pointed — towards simplicity. Why then should anyone want to *nail* it that way?

But the intention is clear:

Language is dynamic; Basic is static. Therefore Basic must be wrong.

Which is just as if one were to say:

Language is dynamic; the *New Method* system is static. Therefore the *New Method* system must be wrong.

For wherein, once again, do Basic and the New Method differ? The idea is the same — simplification. The purpose is the same — a first step to English. The one essential difference is that Basic is complete in itself and so adequate to all the needs of everyday life; the *New Method* is not complete in itself and is therefore not adequate to all the needs of everyday life.

### Ignoring Nature

So what makes Basic 'wrong' is apparently its 'adequacy', and it must be the 'adequacy' of Basic which is 'ignoring the forces of nature'. What, exactly, does Dr. Ballard mean by 'ignoring'? Let us employ a little Basic analysis. 'Ignoring' may mean (in Basic)

- Either 1. Overlooking, not taking into account natural forces, *i. e.*, not possible.
- Or 2. Keeping back, stopping, getting away from, putting the brake on natural tendencies, *i. e.*, not good.

If he means 'not possible' then he is already answered. Because thousands of children and adults all over the world are 'doing the not possible'; they are in fact learning Basic.

If he means 'not good' he must be worried by the thought that the 'masses of the people' who are the 'main agency' in the development of English will be seduced, by Basic, from their loyalty to 'complete' English, and so leave it a limp and lifeless thing without power to develop. Is this likely? Are the masses of English-speaking people in America

and the British Empire likely to 'unlearn' all they know of English and restrict themselves completely and for ever to Basic?

They may choose or be forced to 'descend' to Basic on occasion for analytical purposes, as I was just now, or to facilitate their dealings with non-English-speaking peoples, but will that drive the rest of their English out of their heads? Will they not continue to use it in all their 'home affairs', private and national, and, in using it, to mould it nearer the heart's desire?

And what of the masses of foreigners who will use Basic as a first step to English or to facilitate their dealings with English-speaking peoples? Will the use of Basic prevent *them* from developing their own languages? The very idea is absurd. One feels that if only Dr. Ballard had given more thought to his language he would not so unthinkingly have allowed his language to run away with his thought — for the sake of an epigram!

But what about Basic itself and the forces of nature? Will the masses who use it, even as a second language, consciously or unconsciously modify it? And if they do so modify it will it lose its value?

Let us examine, first, the possibilities of an unconscious modification. We have already seen that changes in language grow out of changes in habit; as habits, customs, ways of life change, so language changes with them. Such changes are possible therefore only where you have a homogeneous mass of people *speaking* the same language daily, indoors and

outdoors, thinking the same thoughts, doing the same things, faced with the same problems.

If English people had used their language only to write one another business letters, or to read and write newspapers, or to address meetings or to discuss scientific discoveries, we may be certain that the English language would never have developed in the way it has done.

But it is precisely for *these* purposes that Basic will be used as an international language — not for telling ribald stories, or putting the baby to bed, or making love, or swearing, or working out the household budget. Even for such things Basic is adequate, but it is not likely to be *needed* for them. Because Basic is a *practical* instrument for the exchange of ideas by people of different countries it is not likely to be subjected to the forces of unconscious change.

On the other hand there will be nothing to prevent an International Basic Congress of the future from passing a resolution laying down, for example, that 'night' shall be spelt 'nite', 'through' — 'thru,' 'fixed' — 'fixt', and so on, or introducing any other changes they may think desirable.

Such changes are already being made in America, and would no doubt have been made in England were it not for the traditional conservatism of that country which is so firmly opposed to snapping any link with the past. But the masses who will use Basic outside England will care nothing about links with a past which is not *their* past; what they want is a second language which is simple to learn and easy to use; and it may well be *they* who



will give the impetus to that 'speeding up' process of which Dr. Ballard speaks; just as it is the millions of foreign immigrants into America who have given it in the past hundred years.

Thus the tendency will be towards greater, not less, simplicity; and any such gain in simplicity will be, *must be*, a further gain for Basic.

But since Dr. Ballard has sought, in prophetic strain, to array the forces of nature against Basic, let us turn to another thinker, a writer and prophet no less renowned than he. In his *Shape of Things to Come* H. G. Wells sees the forces of nature not opposed to Basic but *enlisted* on the side of Basic, and this is how his future historian, looking back, tells the story (in Basic) of Basic.

## Things to Come

One unlooked-for development of the hundred years between 2000 and 2100 was the way in which Basic English became in that short time the common language for use between nations, and the expansion at an even greater rate—as the outcome of this, and after it had been changed in a number of ways—of English itself.

The English used by most of us to-day in talking and writing is a very different tongue from the English of Shakespeare, Addison, Bunyan, or Shaw. It has got away from the last signs of such old and complex forms as a 'subjunctive mood'; the form of a word on paper has become truly representative of its sound; everyone gives the same sound to the same word; a number of words and word-groups have been taken over from other languages.

No attempt was made at forcing it upon other nations as the one language of the Earth. In its natural form

it was better for the purpose in a number of ways than the chief languages in competition with it, Spanish, French, Russian, German and Italian. It was simpler, more delicate, more elastic, and even at that time more widely used, but it was certainly the development of Basic English which in the end gave it the position it now has.

Basic English was the invention of a man whose quick and fertile mind was trained at Cambridge in England. This C. K. Ogden (1889-1990), living long and working hard, gave all his time to the question of getting a simpler relation between language and thought, and specially to the working-out of this one system.... Ogden came through with an English of 850 words, and five or six rules for their operation which would make it possible for any person from another country who had a ready memory to get to the point of talking and writing quite good English in two or three weeks....

Basic was taken up in a most surprising way after the First Conference of Basra. It was made the language for all public and government purposes in every country by the Air and Sea Control, and by 2020 almost everyone was able to make use of Basic for talking and writing.

It is from the starting-point of Basic English, worked with a system in which the form of a word on paper is representative of its sound, that the language used by us today has come into existence, chiefly by putting back, by slow degrees, the 'verbs' and special uses from the mother-tongue, and by taking over words and word-groups from other languages. To-day our language has almost 2,000,000 words in it. It is in fact a language formed from other languages, with roots, words, and special uses taken from the tongues of all nations....

With such speculations, as I have said, we are not immediately concerned. What does concern us

is that our children, today, here and now, should be taught English on the right lines. And which are the right lines? They are the lines which *exploit* those tendencies to simplification in the English language which have made Basic English possible. Because English *is* what it *is* its teaching, as has been proved, can be made immeasurably simpler and more successful than, say, the teaching of French in England.

If every teacher can be made to realize that, then Basic will come into its own much sooner even than Mr. Wells anticipates.



## APPENDIX

### THE BASIC BOOKS

*(An account, in Basic English, based on the list  
printed by the Orthological Institute.)*

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## TO THE READER

The purpose of these pages is to give a fuller account of the most important books in, or about, *Basic English* than was possible in the book itself.

In addition to the 100 here outlined or listed, covering more than 3,000,000 words in *Basic*, there are now at least 50 books in other languages — Chinese, Japanese, Russian, Czech, Latvian, Swedish, Danish, German, French, etc. — through which those with no knowledge of English are able to get control of the system or to make use of it in different ways.

In the past eight years, at least 1,000 accounts of *Basic* have been printed in the newspapers of all countries, and a selection from them will be made later, as a way of marking the 10th year of the existence of *Basic English* (first produced in 1930) and as a guide to those who may be writing for that wider public which gets its first news of international developments from headlines.

It will be seen that side by side with the *Basic Library*, in which details are given of the theory and structure of the system, with examples of its use in all fields, a number of step-by-step *School Books* are now ready, and a further wide range of these is now in the making. At the same time, the *Orthological Institute* is going forward with a new *Outline of the Sciences*, through which the higher levels of thought and discovery may be made part of any school programme.

So, by 1940, with the help of the *General Dictionary* (25,000 words), the *Science Dictionary* (20,000 words), and a new *Dictionary of Current English* (5,000 words commonly used in talking), the *Basic* learner will not only have a key to the language of Shakespeare, Darwin, and the Radio — but a *Library of 5,000,000 words* in a part of that language, complete in itself for international purposes.





# I. SCHOOL BOOKS

## THE BASIC WAY TO ENGLISH

Under the direction of

C. K. OGDEN  
*Director of the Orthological Institute*

with the help of

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HARVEY WILLIAMS  
*Lecturer in English,  
Egyptian University, Cairo*

HARLEY V. USILL  
*General Editor,  
"The Year Book of Education"*

These four step-by-step language books have been designed in answer to the request from different countries for simple school material. Working quickly with these books, the learner will get control of Basic English in six months; working slowly, in two years of a school programme. When he has been through them all, he will be able to do *all* his talking in English and to have *all* his teaching *only* in English. The material of these books is of general interest, and some of the pictures are of Africa, some of Asia, and some of Europe.

The four TEACHING BOOKS have in them all the learners' pages, with teaching notes opposite, page by page.

Three READING BOOKS, covering the substance of Books I and II, Book III, and Book IV, are with the printers.

A SECOND STAGE, which will take the learner on from Basic to complete English, is being produced under the direction of Dr. W. B. Mumford.

## THE BASIC READING BOOKS

BY L. W. LOCKHART

All the stories in these books keep inside the limits of the 850 words of Basic English. Every word in the list is common and simple, and all taken together have a range equal to that of about 20,000. This makes it possible to get away from baby-talk without overstretching the learner's powers. The use of the same words again and again gives him a chance to become certain of himself, but the words say so much that he is not conscious of being limited.

Boys and girls who have gone through these books will be interested enough in reading to take trouble with harder material. Further — and this point is important — they will have got control of the words which will give them most help in learning new words. Basic, with its power of clear and simple statement, is a safe instrument for pinning words down. These books are the first step to its wider use in schools for reading material of every sort.

In building up a healthy outlook nothing is of more value than the development of an interest in the things round about us. The stories in the first two books are about the everyday doings of quite unimportant persons. Facts about such things as clouds, the building of a tree-house, or how to make a fire out of doors are given in the framework of normal experience, and an attempt is made to put common events in an interesting light.

The third Book takes the reader on to simple questions of general knowledge. Starting with things which men do, it goes on to give an account of facts about plants and animals and the earth itself. The pictures in this book give training in learning through the eye.

There are questions at the end of every story in all three Books. These are about the details of the stories, and are for testing the reader's attention.

Book One is at the level of the eight-year-old. Book Three, though simple enough for quite young readers, might well be used for older learners who are making a start with Basic or have been learning English slowly.

## THE BASIC STORY BOOKS

These books — great stories in simple language — are designed as a first step to English letters. Like the Basic Reading Books they all keep inside the limits of the 850 words of Basic English. For boys and girls whose mother-tongue is not English a knowledge of the outline of a work of fiction will be of the greatest help in making it possible to get pleasure from reading it later. Those who may not ever get a knowledge of normal English will at least have these stories for their amusement or education. The stories are printed in simple clear letters with a good number of pictures, and have questions and word tests at the end for language-training.

*Books in this Library.*

1. The Trader of Venice
2. Robinson Crusoe Part 1
3. Robinson Crusoe Part 2
4. The Gold Insect Part 1
5. The Gold Insect Part 2

*With the Printers:*

Gulliver in Lilliput  
Black Beauty

*Ready Shortly:*

Macbeth  
Hamlet  
A Winter's Story  
Japanese Stories  
Stories from France  
Stories from China  
Stories from Hans Andersen  
Stories for the Young

## THE GENERAL KNOWLEDGE BOOKS

## OUR CHANGING TIMES

This Library will give those who are learning Basic, or who are taking their first step with Basic or any other limited word-list, a wide range of reading material of more general interest than the stories commonly offered to the young — which are of very little profit to those desiring new knowledge. The first thirty of these books will be printed at the rate of ten a year, and will be a guide to the inventions by which our way of living has been changed, the discoveries by which the earth has been made to seem smaller, and the sciences by which the organization of society and the arts of peace have been made possible.

*Books in this Library:*

1. Across the Isthmus of Panama
2. Electric Power at Work
3. Fireside Stories
4. Schoolboys of Early Times — I
5. Schoolboys of Early Times — II
6. Great Discoveries
7. The First Virginians
8. The White Man comes to New York
9. How Men have kept their Records
10. Wires Round the Earth
11. To Far Cathay
12. All about Motion Pictures
13. The Post Bag
14. Wings Away

*With the Printers:*

15. Late Night Special
16. The Thunder Bird
17. Airship Flight

*Ready before the end of the year:*

- The Potter's Wheel
- Ships of Yesterday
- Down the Ship's Ways

## BASIC BY PICTURE - STAMPS

Some ten years back, while Basic was still in the early stages, it seemed to us that there might be a use for stamps among the new forms of picture teaching which would have to be tested by the Orthological Institute. In those days the number of picture-stamps was small, and the organization of air-posts was limited to two or three countries which made little use of the special stamps now printed for long-distance flights. Even so, we were able to put together more than a hundred pictures to which additions have been made month by month.

More than 800 examples, making clear the senses and uses of almost all the Basic words, have now been listed, and we have the necessary authority from the Post Office to make use of them for teaching purposes. Those who are not in touch with the science and art of Philately will probably be surprised at the range of interests covered. The marketing of stamps has become a great industry. As much as £300,000 has been given for one American group which the general public has never seen on a letter-cover; there are stamps valued at more than £10,000; and Kings and Presidents are among the experts whose names are on the lips of every schoolboy.

The fact that millions of boys and girls have been putting their pocket-money into these little bits of paper for more than fifty years, and get from them their first knowledge of history and geography, gives us a good start. No one will be able to say that the experience of teachers, which frequently gives the death-blow to new ideas, is against the use of designs less than an inch square, because of some theory about eye adjustments in ten-year-olds.

In addition, the pictures in question, from Costa Rica and Dahomey, from Ecuador and Finland, from Guatemala and Haiti, are generally well designed — much better than any of the pictures in language books for schools. They are works of art, representative of important events in the history of nations; and it is strange that they have never been given attention by those who make the teaching of language their business.

**GENERAL HISTORY** in Outline and Story, by E. H. Carter and C. K. Ogden, gives a bird's-eye view of history in 100,000 words, with pictures from the earliest times to the present day. Being in Basic, it may be used not only by the very young but even by those with a very limited knowledge of English. The writers say: "Our attempt has been to give some idea of the great canvas of history, by lighting up, for example, a group, a man, a town, a ship, or a new invention—things not very important in themselves, but representative of the special qualities of a country or a time. If in this way we have made our readers interested enough to go further, and given them the sort of start which will make it possible for them to get profit by doing so, we have done our part.

**STORIES FROM THE BIBLE**, now in its second printing, is a selection from those parts of the Bible which are most used by teachers in schools, so that the system here is tested over a wide range. The stories are given in their complete form, making possible a comparison with any other Bible verse by verse.

**WISE WORDS OF AN EARLY AMERICAN** is a selection put into Basic from the *Works of Benjamin Franklin*, first printed in 1796. Franklin's work on the physical and medical sciences—on the causes of thunder and of smoking fires, on the errors of the old electric theories, and on inventions in connection with sailing-ships and eye-glasses—is important for the history of their development.

**KEAWE'S BOTTLE** is R. L. Stevenson's story "The Bottle Imp," from *An Island Night's Entertainment*, put into Basic by Miss L. W. Lockhart. For general reading or for school use this is one of the best books on which to make a start, after the senses of the 850 words have been made clear to the learner. In this story, Stevenson had in mind the needs of the Samoans with whom he was living, and he himself made use of very simple language which was sometimes surprisingly near to Basic.

**JULIUS CAESAR** is taken from Plutarch's histories of Julius Caesar and Brutus in *Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans*, by Sir Thomas North. It has been put into Basic by Mr. A. P. Rossiter, and only those parts of North's Plutarch which were used by Shakespeare in his play have been covered. The form of North's prose (taken from *Tudor Translations* (XI and XII) printed under the direction of W. E. Henley in 1896) has been changed as little as possible.

**ARMS AND THE MAN**, by Bernard Shaw, was put into Basic by Miss L. W. Lockhart; and those who are able to make a comparison of the Basic with Mr. Shaw's English, or with the play in its French, German, or Chinese form, will get a good idea of the level at which Basic does its work. (See page 313.)

**LIVING THINGS**, by J. W. N. Sullivan, is a clear account, in 30,000 words, of the structure of living material and the process by which the complex forms which are on the earth to-day have come into existence. How is the 'Theory of Evolution' now supported? How are qualities handed down by plants and animals? Has man any control over the development and distribution of living things? These questions and a number of others are answered for the common reader in the light of our latest knowledge.

**A BASIC PHONETIC READER**, by Professor Lloyd James, gives selections from books in Basic English and facing these, page by page, the same material printed in the International Phonetic Script. There is also a long account, with a number of examples, of the sounds of the English language and how they are made.

**THE BASIC WORD WHEEL** is designed to make clear the structure of a normal English statement, and to give the learner the power to put in order not only the Basic words but his thoughts about them.

(Ready in 1939)

THE GENERAL  
BASIC ENGLISH  
DICTIONARY

GIVING THE SENSES  
OF 25,000 WORDS IN BASIC ENGLISH

WITH PICTURES

UNDER THE DIRECTION OF

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*Writer of "Basic English," etc.*

WITH THE SUPPORT OF

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*University of London*  
*Linguistic Adviser to the B.B.C.*

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*Magdalene College, Cambridge*  
*Writer of 'Principles of Literary Criticism'*

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(*The New Testament will be ready first, in 1939*)

# THE BASIC BIBLE

THE COMPLETE OLD AND NEW  
TESTAMENTS IN BASIC ENGLISH

UNDER THE DIRECTION OF

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*Samuel Davidson Professor of Old Testament Studies  
in the University of London*

WITH THE SUPPORT OF

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Writer of 'Principles of Literary Criticism,' etc.*

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A LITTLE ABOUT GEOGRAPHY  
A LITTLE ABOUT HISTORY  
A LITTLE ABOUT ART

BY  
CLAUDE FLIGHT  
AND  
EDITH LAWRENCE

These are three books by two experts in the art of cutting pictures from the material named *linoleum*. Because this material is commonly used as a floor-covering, such pictures may be made very cheaply by everyone, and 'Lino-Cuts' are now part of the art-training in a great number of schools in different countries.

Opposite every division of each book is a picture designed to make the story interesting to the young reader. There are 64 pages, of which 21 are given to pictures and maps. The page is  $12 \times 10\frac{1}{2}$  inches, so that the print may be of a size which will give no trouble to the eyes, and coloured inks have been used as a further attraction.

JANUS

Janus, who had two faces, was able to see in opposite directions at the same time.

The Basic Janus sees forward into the future and back to the past, for example —

*Future:* "You *will* keep these."

*Past:* "You *kept* these."

The purpose of the apparatus is to make it clear why a past form like *took* is not listed as a separate word in the Basic system and to give at the same time, in one bird's-eye view, the most important form changes in those Basic words whose form is regularly changed as part of the structure of the language.

## 2. BOOKS ABOUT BASIC

**BASIC ENGLISH**, now in its seventh printing, is a general account of the system for readers with a knowledge of English. It gives an idea of the value of Basic as an international language, with a short outline of the structure and the rules. Then comes a fuller statement of the rules and the reasons for them; and, after that, a discussion of the learning and teaching of Basic for all purposes. So this is the book for the general reader who is looking for further details after hearing or reading about Basic.

**THE ABC OF BASIC ENGLISH**, now in its sixth printing, is a guide, in Basic, to all the chief points of Basic English, in three stages: A, the Basic words (which take only fifteen minutes on the records) and their order; B, expansions of form and sense; and C, special uses which are not regular. The book is being put into other languages for the use of those whose natural language is not English.

**BASIC STEP BY STEP**, now in its third printing, gives a detailed account in Basic of the stages by which Basic English, as outlined in *The ABC*, may be made part of the teaching system of any country. The 850 words are grouped in thirty divisions of twenty-five, with a small number of structure words in every group. Anything which would not be clear to the learner from the first simple sense of the word has been listed; and the notes are based on suggestions from teachers of experience in all countries. Though not designed for regular school use in its present form it is the best guide for teachers and learners who are starting out to get a good working knowledge of the system. On it school books in other languages are being based, and with the help of more pictures like the twenty-two given as examples, the senses of the different words and of their expansions may be made clear without waste of time.

**THE BASIC WORDS**, now in its fourth printing, is a guide to the behaviour of the 850, listing, in addition, the complex words (formed by putting Basic words together) and the hundred internationals which may be used with the system. The root sense and other senses are given in French and German, and the words which may take the *-er*, *-ing*, *-ed* endings or *un-* are pointed out. The 250 special uses numbered in *The ABC* are listed with one star, together with 250 which have two stars, as being less important, or not for learners.

**THE BASIC DICTIONARY**, now in its fourth printing, is a selection of about 7,500 of the most necessary words in the English language with suggestions for Basic parallels. It makes clear how the 850 words do their work, and is chiefly for those who have a knowledge of English in its full form but have not had enough experience of Basic to put the words together quickly for themselves. For others, its place has now been taken by *The General Basic English Dictionary* giving in Basic the senses of more than 25,000 words.

**EVERYDAY BASIC**, (which takes the place of *The Basic Traveller*) by Miss L. W. Lockhart, is a guide to the right use of Basic for a number of different purposes — everyday talk in hotels, trains, banks, and restaurants; stories, political material, Radio news, and so on. The book may be used with profit, in connection with *Basic Step by Step*, at any stage when straightforward examples are needed for talking, writing, and reading.

**BASIC BY EXAMPLES**, now in its second printing, gives all the chief uses of the 850 words in Basic statements, so that learners who have been working with *Basic Step by Step* and *The Basic Words* may have a way of testing their knowledge and getting a better control of the system. It will be a help to those whose natural language is not English and who are at a loss how to put the words into such statements as would be of use in normal talking and writing.

**BRIGHTER BASIC**, by C. K. Ogden, now in its second printing. Examples are given of Basic in everyday talks, in story-writing, in verse, and in the art of the 'gagagram' — making clear how wide the range of Basic is, and how it may be used with equal effect for amusement or for any sort of discussion. Learners whose natural language is not English will be able to see from its pages if, and how, they are at a loss when they come across words put together with less respect for the rules than in Basic books with a more serious purpose.

**FROM PICTURES TO LETTERS**, by Mrs. Ellen Walpole, is a detailed account in Basic, for school use, of every step necessary in the first stages of letter-making and simple reading. For the first year the young learners, who come to school when they are three years old, are trained in simple motions and operations, so that their muscles may be ready for the work of the second year, when a serious start is made at reading and writing. By the end of the second year, most of them will have got through the book and be reading and writing Basic without trouble. Though this system of teaching the letters by pictures is a new one, it is clearly based on common sense, and is the outcome of long experience.

**STATEMENT AND SUGGESTION**, by Mr. A. P. Rossiter (Lecturer in English in the University of Durham and Late Instructor in English in the Imperial Naval College, Etajima, Japan), gives the arguments for using Basic as an apparatus for getting a new sense of word values in the reading of verse. The discussion, which is all in Basic, is designed not only for overseas teachers but for English schools and universities, where, by using the 850 words and the Verse list of 100 as a measuring-rod, the reader may be made conscious of the delicate shades of thought and feeling to which, in the hands of writers of taste, language is a key.

**BASIC IN TEACHING : EAST AND WEST**, by Dr. I. A. Richards, a book for English teachers, not in Basic, makes clear some of the important uses of Basic in teaching in the East and the West. It gives an account of the present conditions of English teaching in China and of the reasons for a wide use in China of some language of the West. Turning to the parallel troubles of learners in England and America, Dr. Richards puts forward strong arguments against the current system of language teaching, and gives reasons for his opinion that Basic may be used as a training in the right way of reading English.

**THE SOUND AND FORMS OF BASIC ENGLISH**, by Mr. J. Rantz, is a Basic account of those parts of the science of phonetics which are of use for Basic purposes. It is not a detailed picture for experts but is full of interesting suggestions for helping all those talking what is designed as an international language to make the same noises as far as possible in the same way, and to give their Basic a straightforward English sound. The system of the International Phonetics Association has been used in its simplest form; and in schools where phonetics is a part of language training *A Basic Phonetic Reader*, by Professor Lloyd James, may be used with this book.

**BASIC BY ISOTYPE**, by Dr. Otto Neurath, is an example of the way in which pictures may be made of use for learning the sense of words and statements. Isotype is an international picture language (see *International Picture Language*) and the signs are clear and simple, so that the most important points are seen straight away and are kept in the memory. About 500 of the 850, together with a great number of complex words, are here covered. Two colours have been used where necessary, and the pictures are without doubt the best which have ever been produced for language purposes.

**BASIC ENGLISH VERSUS THE ARTIFICIAL LANGUAGES**, by C. K. Ogden, is an answer to the arguments for Esperanto and other languages put together from European roots, and to the attack made on Basic by the supporters of Esperanto. In addition, there is a detailed account of the errors of Esperanto by Mr. Paul D. Hugon, a discussion of Novial by Miss L. W. Lockhart, and some notes on Occidental by Mr. Gerald A. Moore. Much time is still being wasted on languages which will never be used by more than one person, or are of interest only to a small group. Esperanto has not even given us a structure on which a solid system might later be based; and, in the opinion of experts, this book may well be its death-blow.

**DEBABELIZATION**, by C. K. Ogden, is a general account of the trouble caused by Babel, and of the Way Out — through Basic. Only part of it is in Basic, because it is designed for doubters who are still on the edge of this question; and it will be put into the other languages of Babel for those who have no knowledge of normal English. It is a record of current opinion on the question of an international language, and of the development of Basic in the last 10 years — as the answer.

Other books which may be of interest to those working on Basic theory are:

*Opposition*

*Jeremy Bentham, 1832 — 2032*

*Word Economy*

### 3. BOOKS IN BASIC

**BASIC FOR SCIENCE** is a discussion of the need for an international language in science and of the uses of Basic in this connection. It gives an account of the way in which, with the addition of 100 general science words, and 50 for special fields, Basic will take the expert to a level where science itself is international. The examples are taken from papers on Chemistry, Physics, Biology, and other sciences.

**BASIC FOR ECONOMICS**, by Miss L. W. Lockhart, is based on a selection from the writings of Malthus, Marshall, Cannan, Lavington, and Stamp, made by Professor Sargent Florence with a view to covering as wide a range as possible. The 50 special words needed for experts writing in this field of science have been printed at the front.

**BASIC FOR GEOLOGY**, by P. M. Rossiter, gives five examples of expert writing, as different from one another as possible, put into Basic with the special Geology list of 50 words in addition to the 100 used for General Science. Out of 164 pages, more than 40 are given to the language of Geology and the selection of words for Basic purposes.

**BASIC FOR BUSINESS**, by Mr. S. L. Salzedo, makes clear how the unnecessarily complex forms of normal business language may be put into straightforward and simple English. No less than 60 examples of letters and agreements are given, with the 50 special words needed for all forms of trading; and at the end is a list of common business words with their Basic parallels.

**A BASIC ASTRONOMY**, by Mr. S. L. Salzedo, is a simple account of the stars, using only the 850 Basic words and a small list of special words whose sense is made clear in notes.



**THE CHEMICAL HISTORY OF A CANDLE**, by Michael Faraday, put into Basic by Phyllis Rossiter, is an example of the language at work on the simplest level of international science—using the 100 general science words, and the 50 for Chemistry and Physics. These six talks given by Faraday at the Royal Institution in 1860-1 are still a good base for all early school work in Chemistry, and at the same time they give a clear idea of the reasoning processes responsible for the growth of our knowledge. Faraday lets his young hearers see how one question comes out of another; and the very heart of his teaching is that wise doubt which is the start, if not the end, of all true science.

**THE OUTLOOK OF SCIENCE** is one of two books which have been made from a selection of papers by Professor J. B. S. Haldane and put into Basic by Mr. W. Empson. We are here given the latest views on how living beings first came into existence, man as a sea animal, the effects of size, the value of scales, the future of man, and how the earth will come to an end. This is not a book for experts but for the general reader, so only the 850 Basic words have been used, without the help of the special science lists.

**SCIENCE AND WELL-BEING** is a further selection of papers by Professor J. B. S. Haldane, put into Basic by Mr. W. Empson. Like *The Outlook of Science* it gives us the views of a worker on biology, a man of very fertile ideas and wide knowledge, on important questions of general public interest, such as the need for Doubt, what comes after Death, and the viewpoint of History.

**THE MENO OF PLATO**, put into Basic by J. Rantz, is an attempt to give the reader something into which he may get his teeth more deeply than is possible with stories taken at their face value.

**INTERNATIONAL TALKS**, by Mr. Wickham Steed, Editor of *The Times* till 1922, were produced by him as an example of the way in which, by the use of straightforward English free from the tricks of newspaper writers, international questions might be made clear to the general reader. They are here printed side by side with their Basic parallels, for the use of those who have a working knowledge of English. By keeping the Basic covered over till an attempt has been made to put the opposite page, line by line, into the 850 words, and then making a comparison, the learner will get answers to the chief questions by which all who are making a start with Basic are naturally troubled, without any time being wasted on looking up details in *The Basic Dictionary*.

**THE ORGANIZATION OF PEACE**, by Maxwell Garnett, C.B.E., Sc.D. (onetime Secretary of the League of Nations Union), is a Basic history of the growth of the League of Nations, making clear why an international organization became necessary, how the League was formed, how it does its work, and what it has in view. The book will be of interest to all those who see in Basic the hope of a happier future in international relations.

**INTERNATIONAL PICTURE LANGUAGE**, by Dr. Otto Neurath, is a first general outline (in Basic) of an international system of education by pictures ('Isotype'). The system is now ready for use in all fields; and the material, here taken from the point of view of teaching and advertisement, is in harmony with the selection of pictures given in the same writer's *Basic by Isotype*.

**BASIC RULES OF REASON**, by Dr. I. A. Richards, gives a Basic account of the process of reasoning, that is, putting our thoughts into a system so that the connections between them become clear and we see that if certain of them are taken as true certain others have necessarily to be given the same belief. Basic, he says, is better for this sort of discussion than a more complete language; and he gives examples based on a selection of 26 key words.

**THE TWO FRIENDS**, by Ivan Tourgenieff (Basic by Mr. Noel Evans), is another attempt to put the work of one of the great Russian writers before an international public. It is a simple country story, full of quiet humour. Anyone who has the idea of learning the language of Peter the Great and Lenin will get great help not only from the experiences of these friends but from *The Basis and Essentials of Russian* and the Russian form of *Basic Step by Step* printed in the U.S.S.R.

**DEATH IN HIGH SOCIETY**, and Other Stories, is the work of Miss Inez Holuen, who is an expert in the art of interesting a wide public. They are representative of an important part of the reading material on which the value of Basic for general purposes has to be tested. The story from which the book takes its name was given in its Basic form on the short-wave Radio in 1935 without anyone being conscious that it was not in an English of 20,000 words. At the front of the book is a picture of Miss Holden by Augustus John.

**THAT NIGHT** is a Japanese play by Mr. Kyôson Tumura, put into Basic by Mr. F. J. Daniels as test material for the making of a Japanese-Basic English word-book. In the first part of the book the Japanese is printed with a word-for-word Basic parallel; and in the second the play is given again in smoother Basic. From these two forms Japanese learners will be able to get the Basic sense of every word of the Japanese, and to see what adjustments are necessary if the effect is to seem natural in English.

**CARL AND ANNA**, by Leonhard Frank, put into Basic by Miss L. W. Lockhart and now in its second printing, was the first attempt to give the general public a complete work of fiction without going outside the Basic word list. It is not for school use — if only because the woman with whom Carl goes off into the snow is married to another. But in time of war such exchanges do take place, and the story had international approval as a book, a play, and a moving picture, in the form given it by Mr. Cyrus Brooks.

**THE BASIC ST. MARK** is part of the complete Basic Bible on which work was started in 1930. After three hundred years it is sometimes hard even for English readers to get the sense of the older forms of language in the King James Bible; but for those whose mother tongue is different in structure from European languages, it is ever harder. This fifth great Bible undertaking (if Tyndale and the American Translation of 1931 are listed with the King James Bible and the Revised Version) will be the first with an international purpose. In addition to the 50 special Bible words, the list of 100 for reading and writing Verse has been used when needed, and it will be seen from these examples, how with less than 15% of the old Bible language, it is possible to keep the feeling and sense of the Hebrew and the Greek.

**THE BASIC ST. JOHN** is the work of the Rev. Edwin Smith, Editorial Superintendent of the British and Foreign Bible Society. It is even simpler than *St. Mark*; and so that the story may not be broken up unnaturally, the numbers of the verses have been printed down the side of the page.

**THE SONG OF SONGS**, put into Basic by Ma Than E, Basic Representative in Burma, is different from the other parts of the Basic Bible now printed separately because the language questions here faced are nearer to those covered by Mr. Rossiter's *Statement and Suggestion*. In addition to the Song of Solomon, the reader is given not only Ecclesiastes but a Note on the verses by St. Peter Damiani, "*Quis est Hic?*" (based on the Song of Songs), with a Basic parallel to make the rhythm clearer.

**THE BIBLE: WHAT IT IS AND WHAT IS IN IT** is a book of 150,000 words in Basic, by the Rev. E. Evans, Vicar of Hellifield, and Professor T. H. Robinson, of University College, Cardiff, designed for Christian readers in Africa and Asia. There is a short special list, on page 381, giving the sense of all words outside the 850.

**AFRICAN BELIEFS AND CHRISTIAN FAITH**, by Edwin W. Smith, is by a writer whose earlier works, *Ila Speaking Peoples of Northern Rhodesia*, *The Golden Stool*, and *Aggrey of Africa* were based on a wide experience of African conditions. The sense of a small number of special words, such as *clan*, *custom*, *slave*, *taboo*, needed for African purposes, is made clear in footnotes; and fourteen other words (*banana*, *buffalo*, *calabash*, *drum*, *eland*, *elephant*, *fig*, *hare*, *hoe*, *hyena*, *lechwe*, *lizard*, *spider*, *was*) come into the story. In 1935 Mr. Smith was President of the Royal Anthropological Society and is an expert on African languages. He here puts Christian beliefs before his African readers so clearly and naturally that, as *The Speaker* has said (January 23rd, 1937), though keeping to the limits of Basic, "his excellent book seems thereby to win an added charm."

**TWENTIETH CENTURY HOUSES**, by Raymond McGrath.  
(See page 312.)

**THE STORY OF THE LETTERS AND NUMBERS.** Before the end of 1938 a new book on the Letters and Numbers in use now and in the past will be ready for the public. There will be 39 full-page pictures giving 60 A-B-Cs, together with Egyptian, 'Cuneiform' or V-mark writing, and Chinese. There are almost 4000 different letters in the work. Two of the pictures give the development of our number forms, and one is a language map.

All our science and all our records are based on writing and numbering, so this is an important addition to the Basic Science Library. More is said about the sounds of the letters than in most books on this question, and a full account is given of the very complex outlines of the A-B-Cs of the East, in most of which one letter is used for a group of 2 to 6 or more of our letters. Though it has not been possible to give *all* the complex letters of the 300-400 ways of writing the A-B-C, there is such a great number of examples and the account is so detailed that it will not be hard for anyone who will take a little trouble with them to make out the true sounds.

The latest discoveries about the early history of our A-B-C are covered by an account of the letters from Sinai, Ras Shamra, and Lachish. The writer has even gone so far as to give the name of the man who *may* have made the invention of true letters.

It is hoped that this work will be of use not only to learners of out-of-the-way languages but, in addition, to anyone who has pictures, money, pots, and stamps with strange writing on them. To make the material of greater value to those interested in such side lines of art, ornament, or industry, we have put in, where possible, examples of the stamps on which the different forms of writing are to be seen.

#### 4. MORE BASIC SCIENCE

In connection with *The Basic Science Dictionary*, which will be ready in 1939, giving the senses of more than 20,000 words in Basic, a number of additions to the Basic Science Library are now being printed. In October, 1938, come *Inventions To-day*, by Dr. H. Stafford Hatfield, and *The Growth of Science*, by A. P. Rossiter. *Science in Society* by J. G. Crowther, and *The Roots of Science*, by J. A. Lauvèrys, are listed for November; and, covering the general field from a different angle, *European Science* and *The Bases of Physical Science*, by Dr. Hatfield, who will in addition be responsible for *Electricity* and *Magnetism*, *What Things are Made of*, and four further outlines of special branches of physical work.

## 5. BASIC IN OTHER LANGUAGES

The list of Basic books printed in other countries is increasing month by month, and those who are interested in getting Basic material which has been put into different languages may do so by writing to Basic representatives in the countries in question, whose names are given at the end of this book.

There is a great Basic-Chinese Wall-map made by the Orthological Institute of China, Records by Dr. Y. R. Chao, and a wide range of books in Chinese. The prices of books now in print in Japan are: *ABC*, 1.50 yen; *New Guide*, 1 yen; *Basic By Examples*, 85 sen; *Short Guide*, 45 sen; *Basic for Business*, 2.50 yen; *Century Readers* (Books I and II), 1.50 yen. *The Strange House, Japan and some English Writers*, and *Robinson Crusoe* are 50 sen a copy, and there is now a *Basic Japanese* by Professor Kōchi Doi. The *Japanese Basic Dictionary*, by Mr. Daniels, will not be ready till 1939.

The price of Dr. Purcell's *Basic English for Malaya* is 1 dollar (Singapore); of Dr. Vočadlo's *Basic Key* for Czech learners (Brno), about 1/6; of Mrs. Taylor's Danish outline *Basic Engelsk* (Gyldendal, Copenhagen), about 2/-. A number of Basic books have been produced in the U.S.S.R., together with Basic Records. The *ABC* may be had in Latvian, by Dr. Rolavs, and in Swedish, and the German and French form of this and *Basic Step by Step* are now being printed in London. Teaching in African languages is given in Basic by *The African Defender* (Johannesburg).

Details of these and other developments, with the names of bookstores which keep the Basic books in out-of-the-way parts, are given from time to time in *The Basic News*.



## 6. LEARNING OF OTHER LANGUAGES

### THE BASIS AND ESSENTIALS OF FRENCH

"An astonishing little book, priceless to the beginner. Introducing a method of learning French which, though absolutely sound and authoritative, is revolutionary in its simplicity."—*Everyman*.

### GERMAN

"The book the language teacher has longed for, but has almost despaired of ever seeing. . . . A notable addition to the array of German text-books."—*The London Teacher*.

"It could hardly be bettered."—*Times Literary Supplement*.

### SPANISH

"The most compact outline of Spanish in existence."

—*The Teachers' World*.

### RUSSIAN

"A carefully planned primer. The authors have worked hard at condensing the grammatical rules, after which they provide a vocabulary of several thousand words, with some 1,600 of the more 'essential' words printed in distinctive type. Much to be commended."—*Times*.

"The clear typography assists a very good book."

—*Times Literary Supplement*.

### ITALIAN

Readers: *German, Spanish, Russian*

The *French* and *Italian* Readers will be ready early in 1939

Under the Direction of Charles Duff  
Based on Basic English

The best guide to the chief languages of the earth.  
Portuguese, Hindustani, and Chinese are on the way.

"These books may be strongly recommended to adult students or those working without a teacher; they would be extremely useful for evening classes, continuation schools and all those seeking to acquire a knowledge of foreign languages for special purposes."

—*Times Literary Supplement*

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## BASIC ENGLISH

### **Burma**

Ma Than E,  
19 Cushing Compound,  
Rangoon.

### **China**

The Orthological Institute  
of China,  
8, Shui Yueh An,  
Peiping.

### **Cochinchina**

Dang Cong Thang,  
288, rue Lagrandière,  
Saigon.

### **Czechoslovakia**

J. V. Frydl,  
Spálená ul. 31,  
Praha II.

### **Danubian Centre**

Dr. Otakar Vočadlo,  
Komensky University,  
Bratislava.

### **Denmark**

Mrs. Kamma Taylor,  
Lille Strandvej 18A,  
Hellerup, Copenhagen.

### **Egypt**

E. H. Paxton,  
Faculty of Arts,  
Egyptian University,  
Cairo.

### **France**

Mlle. Camille Nory,  
10, rue Louis Besquel,  
Vincennes, Paris.

### **Germany**

Dr. Hans Horst,  
29, Böcklinstrasse,  
Mannheim.

### **Holland**

The Mundaneum Institute,  
267, Obrechtstraat,  
The Hague.

### **Hungary**

Julius Halász,  
Györi ut 12, Budapest I.

### **Iceland**

Snaebjörn Jonsson,  
4, Austurstraeti,  
Reykjavik.

### **India**

Adolph Myers,  
c/o "The Times of India,"  
Bombay.

## REPRESENTATIVES, 1938

### Japan

T. Takata,  
Toyama Kotogakko,  
Toyama-Shigai,  
Toyama-Ken.

### Latvia

Ernest Rolavs,  
Rūpniecības ielā 3<sup>b</sup>,  
Riga.

### Malaya

Dr. V. Purcell,  
Protector of Chinese,  
Kedah.

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